

**Title:** **Agenda Item 6 - Communications Update**

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**Organisation:** **Dept of Health & HSE**

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Action required:

For noting

For discussion

For decision

Approved for future publication: YES/NO (remove as applicable)

## **NPHE – Communications Update**

### **29 October**

#### **Quantitative Tracker**

The nationally representative sample of 1,900 people conducted on behalf of the Department of Health on 26 Oct, available [here](#) reveals

- Indications that the level of worry is starting to plateau in the last few weeks, though still high at 6.6/10
- The majority, 43%, now believe that the worst of the pandemic is happening now with 34% believing it is ahead of us.
- 81% of the population say they are staying at home rather than going out – an upward trend which began at the beginning of October, suggesting anticipatory behaviour.
- The emotional rollercoaster continues with stress and loneliness the two emotions which have seen significant increase recently.

#### **Qualitative Tracker**

The qualitative tracker is now running on a fortnightly basis and will be update next week.

#### **Covid-19 Communications and Behavioural Advisory Group – Oct Meeting**

The Advisory Group met on 23 Oct to review the latest data and had significant discussion on the implementation of fines and penalties for breaking COVID-19 public health restrictions. Feedback below.

- Evidence from both psychology and economics suggests that authoritative and punitive approaches in this context are at best ineffective, and at worst counterproductive.
- An international study, [iCARE](#), surveyed COVID-19 related attitudes, concerns and behaviours since the outset of the pandemic among 65,000 people living in 140 countries, including Ireland. When asked which measures convince them to adhere to public health restrictions, people consistently say that threats of fines and arrest are the least persuasive.
- This has crucial implications for government policy and communications strategies. Not only are penalties not likely to be effective, but they may also have unintended consequences of damaging social cohesion and collective willingness to engage with the restrictions.
- The current proposed fine amounts are very high and will likely to lead to [issues of non-payment](#). If fines lead to non-payment, resulting in court appearances / imprisonment, the introduction of fines could lead to negative outcomes like increased recidivism. Similarly, with high fine amounts, a fine could create serious financial and psychological distress for those with lower incomes.
- Current compliance with mask-wearing is 96%+ according to the latest Amarach tracker survey. Introducing fines for behaviours with high compliance might backfire by 1) over penalising those who unintentionally break the rule (e.g. forgetting your mask) and 2) by further agitating the very small minority who aren't complying.

### **Communication Priorities**

1. Cases and Contacts
  - Social media campaign underway. COVID yellow TV ad – week commencing 2 Nov
2. Young Adults
  - Co-creating solutions to increase young adults' compliance – end Nov
3. Older People
  - Winter communications campaign targeting older people to commence mid Nov

### **Campaigns underway now**

- HSE Bubble campaign & influencer social media campaign
- Flu campaign
- Healthy Ireland Community Resilience campaign