

National Public Health Emergency Team

12th May 2020

Reopening Plans: cross-comparison between Ireland & UK plans

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Action required

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

Summary Main Points

There is much similarity but also several important points of difference between the respective Ireland and UK plans for re-opening.

Ireland's unwinding of measures will occur at a more conservative pace and over a longer timeframe than in the UK. The UK's third of three steps will be around 4 July, at which time Ireland would have only just entered its Phase 3 and would still have two further phases to go (Phase 4 on 20th July and Phase 5 on 10th August).

Furthermore, the UK plan sees a frontloading of the unwinding of measures, with few measures left to be unwound in Step 3; by contrast, the Irish plan is more evenly balanced throughout the phases. While the Irish plan is envisaged to take place in three-week phases, the first UK step is a little short of three weeks and the second step is nearly five weeks.

	Ireland	UK	
Phase 1	18 th May	13 th May	Step 1
Phase 2	8 th June	1 st June	Step 2
Phase 3	29 th June	4 th July	Step 3
Phase 4	20 th July		
Phase 5	10 th August		

Importantly, it is anticipated that the reopening in the UK will not be uniform but instead occur at different paces in different parts of the UK, based on different epidemiological assessments. *"Different parts of the UK have different R figures. The devolved administrations are making their own assessments about the lifting of measures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. All governments continue to work together to ensure a coordinated approach"*. (Ireland's plan envisages "ideally a whole-of-country approach but potentially a differentiated geographical approach depending on circumstances eg urban / rural".)

In **Northern Ireland**, FM Arlene Foster flagged yesterday that they have extended existing measures by three weeks and may introduce only nuanced changes in that time. The NI Executive is due to present to the Assembly on 12th May its plan entitled a *Pathway to Recovery*, a gradual plan framed by five guiding principles and with progress to be reviewed every three weeks.

On North-South cooperation, while the Irish plan references the benefit of close engagement and where possible alignment of measures (including also East-West links), the UK plan does not reference cooperation or co-ordination with Ireland beyond references to the CTA.

The UK Government places itself currently at Phase Two (smarter controls) of its pandemic response, having in Phase One sought to contain, delay and mitigate (and concurrently research) the spread of the disease. Phase Two is about gradually replacing the existing social restrictions with smarter measures and controls in aiming to have a large, controlling effect on the epidemic but with the lowest health, economic and social costs. Phase Three (reliable treatment) would follow when rollout of effective treatments and/or a vaccine would mean the effect of the virus is reduced to more manageable levels.

The UK's five review tests for moving from one step to the next echo our own five disease indicators:

	Ireland	UK
1	Trajectory in incidence of disease	SAGE data showing rate of infection decreasing
2	Trajectory in number of deaths	Sustained and consistent fall in daily death rates
3	Hospitalisation and ICU occupancy	Able to provide sufficient critical care treatment
4	Programme to sample, test and contact trace	Confidence that a range of operational challenges including testing & PPE in hand
5	Trajectory of case / cluster numbers in residential healthcare settings	Confidence that measures unwound will not risk a second peak of infections

The UK plan notes that real challenges remain on operational support for managing the virus and that their Government cannot yet be confident that major adjustments now will not risk a second peak of infections that might overwhelm the NHS.

There is specific reference in the UK plan to the need to prepare for the winter flu season and a statement that “the biggest threat to life remains the risk of a second peak that overwhelms the healthcare system this winter”. Although both plans cover similar ground, the UK has more detail on factors to be taken into consideration in national decision-making to include non-Covid health effects, social effects and a list of economic factors including financial stability, fiscal sustainability and distributional effects.

Detail by sector

International travel

Both plans reference the need to manage the risk posed by imported cases and both plans reference the provision of public health information to arriving passengers. The UK plans to introduce from later this month the existing regime in Ireland of incoming passengers self-isolating for 14 days and providing contact details and the address where they will self-isolate. While this remains an administrative scheme in Ireland, in the UK passengers (note: aviation passengers) who cannot demonstrate where they will self-isolate will be required to do so in accommodation arranged by the government.

In the UK, arriving passengers will be strongly advised to download the NHS contact tracing app. The Irish approach includes a surveillance process – follow up calls to passengers within 14 days of arrival - which is not explicitly part of UK plans. Both countries provide for exemptions from the need to self-isolate for essential supply chain workers – the UK has signalled that additional exemptions will apply so as not to impede the delivery of national security functions, the support of critical infrastructure or meeting international obligations. Exemptions will also apply to travel within the Common Travel Area. Ireland is considering its position on exemptions and the provision of accommodation supports for people self-isolating, but is unlikely to provide an exemption for travel within the CTA.

Education and childcare

There are significant differences in approach on education and childcare.

Currently in the UK vulnerable children and children of essential workers attend school. In Ireland crèches, childminders and preschools for children of essential workers will not open until June 23 onwards and for non-essential workers from 20th July.

In England, the aim is to have all primary school children return to school in June for a month before the summer if feasible. In Ireland primary and secondary schools will re-open for the next academic year. The BBC reports that there is not expected to be a return to schools in Northern Ireland until September.

Economic activity and work

The Irish roadmap has more detailed criteria in its risk-based approach to determining the opening stages for different types of businesses – ie initially outdoor workers on May 18th, those able to maintain 2m from 8 June, those with low levels of interaction from 29th June, those who cannot work remotely but can stagger shifts etc from 20th July and finally other businesses from 10th August.

In the UK (England) from May 13th sectors such as food production, construction, manufacturing, logistics and distribution will be open and all workers who cannot work from home should attend their workplace. In Scotland Nicola Sturgeon has said that she is not asking anybody who is not working to go back to work, although they are looking, with priority, at the construction sector, the retail sector and the manufacturing sector.

Retail

Both plans emphasise the need for retail services to continue to observe social distancing in the retail setting, where essential services are opening first and non-essential retail is opening last. The UK plan is less detailed in the types of businesses that can open. Ireland has cafés and restaurants re-opening slightly earlier than the UK does. Both plans are cautious on re-opening hotels in July.

The UK envisages non-essential retail opening from the start of June while in Ireland much non-essential retail will re-open from the end of June (with small retail open from 8th June).

In the UK, from 4th July the aim is to open some of the remaining high risk businesses and premises that have been required to close, including personal care such as hairdressers and beauty salons or hospitality such as food service providers. In Ireland, high risk businesses for which there is a population-wide demand such as hairdressers will reopen from 20th July.

Cultural and social activities

UK has sporting activities taking place behind closed doors at the start of June whereas in Ireland this will not be permitted until the end of June.

The UK plan has the ambition of reopening social spaces such as places of worship and cinemas after the 4th of July. In the Irish plan these are not reopened until the fourth or fifth phase, half a month after they would be open in the UK. The UK plan is not as specific about categories of social venues, it is assumed that everything would reopen with social distancing in place from the third phase onwards.

Transport and Travel

The UK places more emphasis on walking and cycling (additional funding of cycle lanes) although both plans mention private cars. The UK plan advises people to continue to avoid public transport where possible. The Irish plan places a focus on monitoring of data on traveller numbers that is absent in the UK approach. The UK plan is also silent on travel to offshore islands, which will resume in Ireland as part of phase 5.

Health and Social Care

Both plans aspire to meeting non-COVID-19 healthcare objectives and to the delivery of healthcare services in new ways, such as tele-medicine. The Irish plan includes provision for the restoration of visits to settings such as hospitals, residential care homes and prisons – the UK plan does not address visits but does note the need to support these sectors including through priority access to PPE.

Ends.