

NPHET Briefing Note – 10th June 2020

Outbreaks of COVID-19 associated with meat processing plants in Ireland.

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Epidemiology

Numbers involved

1. As of 9th June 2020, there are 1,104 notifications of COVID-19 associated with outbreaks in meat processing plants in Ireland.
2. 22 facilities in total are involved, with 10 facilities affected in HSE North East, 3 in HSE Midlands, 3 in HSE Midwest, 2 each in HSE East and HSE West, and 1 each in HSE South and HSE South East.

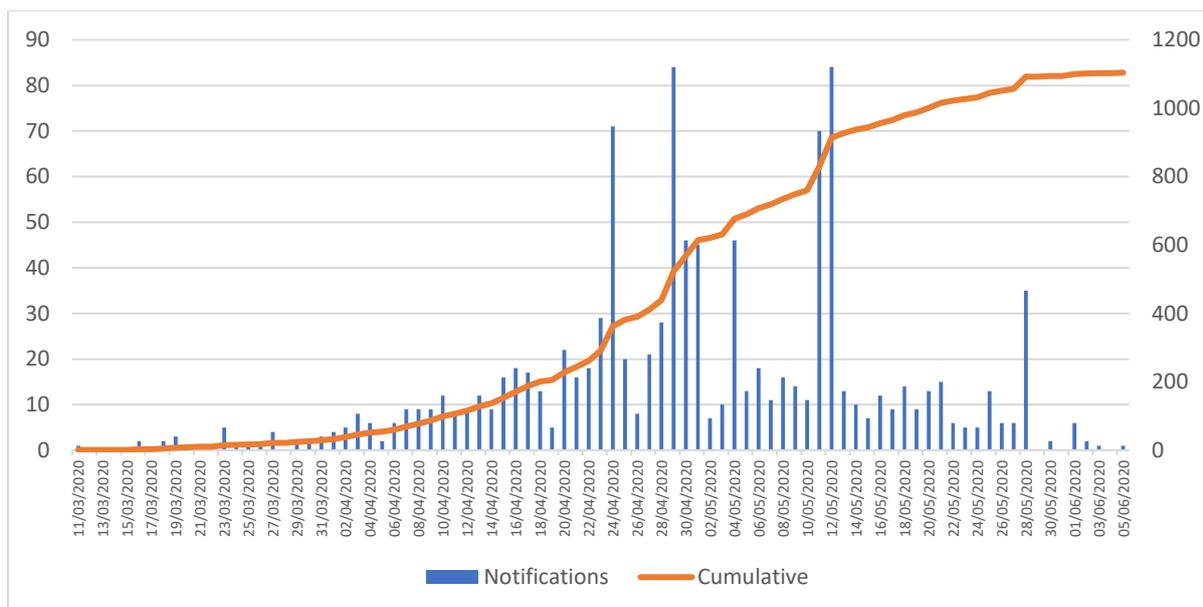
Facility Number	No. Events associated with Outbreak
Facility 01	299
Facility 02	141
Facility 03	142
Facility 04	114
Facility 05	113
Facility 06	100
Facility 07	37
Facility 08	37
Facility 09	25
Facility 10	25
Facility 11	0
Facility 12	14
Facility 13	21
Facility 14	7
Facility 15	4
Facility 16	3
Facility 17	0
Facility 18	4
Facility 19	6
Facility 20	6
Facility 21	2
Facility 22	4

Investigations are still ongoing in many facilities, with some facilities (such as 11 and 17) not having formal numbers pending further assessment.

3. 16 are under active investigation, and 6 outbreaks have been declared over.
4. Onset dates range from the 11th of March to the 28th of May (the last epi date recorded is a specimen collection date on 5th June).

Demographics

5. The population affected are primarily young, with 58.1% of cases aged between 25 and 44.
6. The majority of cases are male (77.4%).
7. Nationality information is unavailable for the majority of cases at present (not specified for 88.9% of cases on CIDR).



Site of care

8. The vast majority of patients have been able to remain in the community during the course of their illness, with only 2.8% (n=31) requiring admission to hospital (increase of one from last week).
9. Of these 31, eight patients required admission to ICU (0.7% of the total number who were ill).

Infectious period

10. It is estimated that 95.2% (n=1,051) of cases are out of their infectious period (based on a diagnosis date that is 14 or more days ago). 82.8% (n=914) of cases are 28 days or more after their diagnosis and are estimated to have returned to work.

HSE local outbreak control teams

11. Two new outbreaks have been notified since the last briefing paper for NPHET dated 3rd June 2020.
12. One is located in HSE North East and the other is located in HSE West.

Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine

13. As part of a follow up after the issuing of the interim guidelines by the national outbreak control team, DAFM wrote to all meat plants on 19th May, requested each plant to outline in writing to DAFM the actions that the plant has taken to comply with the guidelines. As of 8th June, responses had been received from 147 of the 150 plants under DAFM supervision, including all medium and large operations.
14. Based on feedback from DAFM staff, submissions received from each meat plant, and feedback received from the HSA, there now appears to be a generally high level of compliance with the guidelines issued by the NOCT on 15th May.
15. The HSA inspections that have taken place in meat plants and are ongoing since 20th May have given feedback to DAFM Veterinary Inspectors on each occasion.

16. On foot of HSA feedback and ongoing discussions DAFM has on 28th May significantly updated its own guidance to staff in meat plants in respect of PPE, risk assessment and other related issues.

Health and Safety Authority Inspections

17. The Health and Safety Authority continues its inspection campaign of meat processing facilities. As of close of business Monday 8th June, the Authority has inspected 17 facilities connected with OCTs.
18. A joint re- inspection of one facility involving inspectors from the Authority along with officials from the HSE Dept. of Public Health, Environmental Health and the Dept. of Agriculture Food and Marine, was scheduled for Tuesday 9th June. This will be third such inter-agency site visit, two of which previously have been to one facility.
19. Inspections of the remaining facilities associated with the OCTs will be substantively completed by June 12th.

Recent National Outbreak Team Activities

20. The national outbreak control team are progressing towards finalising a business continuity guidance document.
21. This document reflects the understanding of the outbreak control team that these workers and this industry are designated as essential by government authorities, while also balancing the risks of the spread of infection if the facilities continue to operate.
22. This document addresses controlling spread while maintaining production, outbreak control, and considerations for plant closure.
23. Representatives from the National OCT attended a meeting of the CDC, ECDC and representatives from EU Member States regarding meat processing facilities on 8th June 2020. Issues are similar in all countries.
 - a. Other countries also report that their workforces in this industry are seeming to be particularly susceptible to outbreaks of COVID-19.
 - b. The workers in other countries also tend to live in over-crowded accommodation.
24. The national OCT meeting was held on Tuesday June 9th and the items discussed were:
 - a. Feedback from NPHET regarding recommendations in interim report, who is responsible and timeframes. The OCT will revert on this following consultation with relevant parties.
 - b. Business continuity document - This document addresses controlling spread while maintaining production, outbreak control, considerations for plant closure.
 - c. Feedback from Prof Martin Cormican regarding PPE in meat processing facilities.
 - d. Updates from DAFM on the implementation of the interim guidance.

25. The national outbreak control team has previously issued recommendations as part of its update process. The recommendations, responsible parties, and timelines are summarised in the following table.

Recommendation	Responsible party	Timeline
1. Meat processing plants should continue to follow the interim guidelines which have been issued	Management of meat processing facilities	In place - Ongoing
2. Health and Safety Authority to continue with inspections of meat processing facilities	Health and Safety Authority	Ongoing
3. Interim guidelines to be updated as required	HSE / HPSC / OCT	Ongoing as new evidence or issues emerge
4. Meat processing plants should consider employing an occupational health service to deal with COVID-19 related issues	Management of meat processing facilities	Immediate
5. Encourage workers in meat processing facilities to register with a general practitioner	Management of meat processing facilities	Immediate
6. Meat processing plants to maintain records on the principal language of their staff members	Management of meat processing facilities	Immediate
7. Translation of resources into additional languages	HSE / HPSC / OCT	Completion date June 24 th 2020
8. Independent interpreters should be used in facilities	Management of meat processing facilities	If an outbreak occurs in the facility
9. Further investigation into	HSE / HPSC / OCT	Scoping / preliminary work in progress

Recommendation	Responsible party	Timeline
social factors of disease among meat factory workers		
10. Further investigation into facility related factors of disease among meat factory workers	HSE / HPSC / OCT	Scoping / preliminary work in progress
11. *Minister for Health to enact regulations to allow for the closure of premises as per Section 31A of the Health Act of 1947 (inserted under the Health (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act of 2020).	Department of Health	NPHET is considering

*Note - NPHET to advise if this recommendation is appropriate for this document.