

National Public Health Emergency Team

2 July 2020

Update on Overseas Travel

Date document prepared: 1 July

Action required

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

International outlook

In recent days, the total number of confirmed cases globally has passed 10.5 million and the number of Covid related deaths recorded stands at 512,071.

There have been sharp spikes in cases numbers recorded in Europe and further afield as social distancing restrictions are lifted. In Switzerland, 300 people had to be quarantined after a guest at a nightclub tested positive. The Czech Republic recorded its largest increase in case numbers since early April with 168 new cases on 26 June and 120 on 27 June. Mexico has recorded more than 4,000 cases per day in recent days; in Brazil confirmed case numbers have exceeded 30,000 per day. China has imposed a strict lockdown on an area with a population of 500,000.

In Ireland, there has been an uptick in travel-related cases in recent times. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been 593 travel-related cases (2.3% of the total), with 33 cases associated with travel notified in June. Table 1 shows the 14-day incidence rates and testing statistics for EU27 countries.

Overseas Travel Restrictions

Work is underway by Government and at EU level to establish 'air bridges' or reciprocal travel arrangements with countries that have a broadly similar or better epidemiological profile (which can be verified as such).

From 1 July, EU Schengen area countries are due to allow unimpeded travel from the following 15 countries, with a review every two weeks: Algeria, Australia, Canada, Georgia, Japan, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Rwanda, Serbia, South Korea, Thailand, Tunisia, Thailand, Uruguay and, subject to reciprocity, China. (See Table 2 below.) It is up to each Member State to decide whether to lift travel restrictions or whether measures such as 14-day self-isolation will apply to travellers from Third Countries (provided these measures also apply to their own citizens). In lifting restrictions on these 15 countries, the EU Schengen area countries will be maintaining in place a ban on non-essential travel from 90% of countries in the rest of the world. It will be for Government to decide whether Ireland chooses to align itself with this EU approach by waiving advice to self-isolate for passengers arriving from the schedule of countries provided by the EU.

Ireland remains the only EU country that does not have any Covid-related legal impediments to incoming travel. While arriving passengers must complete a passenger locator form, incoming passengers are advised but not required to self-isolate for 14 days.

To address the risk of importing cases of Covid-19 from higher risk countries outside the 'green list', and to establish credible 'air bridges', legal measures should be introduced to restrict travel from countries outside the 'air bridges'. At its meeting on 25 June, the

National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) reiterated with urgency its prior recommendations on the need for legal restrictions to be put in place regarding overseas travel.

Historically low passenger numbers since March (about 1-2% of normal levels), and general population movement restrictions in place for much of the intervening time, served to mitigate the risks of imported cases. Neither condition holds any longer.

Table 1: 14 day incidence rates and testing stats for EU27 countries

	Incidence 14 days	New cases last 14 days	New cases Previous 14 days	Pct change in new cases 14 days	Sho (s)
Sweden	149.40	15,284	13,800	4.91%	
Portugal	47.45	4,876	3,990	12.45%	
Luxembourg	29.97	184	51	247.17%	0.1
Romania	22.75	4,417	2,601	59.63%	3.1
United Kingdom	22.67	15,108	19,557	-26.39%	1.6
Bulgaria	21.29	1,490	777	79.95%	5.4
Czech Republic	16.35	1,741	722	128.48%	2.7
Croatia	11.55	471	6	5787.50%	3.6
Poland	11.50	4,366	5,227	-22.35%	2.5
Spain **	10.36	4,861	4,290	8.72%	
France	10.28	6,888	5,129	30.43%	
Belgium	9.93	1,137	1,444	-28.58%	0.8
Denmark	9.20	534	494	3.09%	0.3
Germany	8.94	7,420	4,433	54.23%	
Netherlands	8.33	1,440	2,238	-35.66%	1
Austria	6.78	601	375	49.50%	0.7
Italy	5.21	3,146	3,792	-23.14%	0.5
Slovenia	4.28	89	20	323.81%	0.6
Malta	4.05	20	29	-35.48%	
Ireland	2.88	141	241	-45.56%	
Greece	2.39	256	204	17.97%	0.5
Slovakia	2.07	113	26	276.67%	0.9
Finland	1.83	101	219	-54.71%	0.5
Lithuania	1.54	43	90	-54.74%	0.2
Cyprus	1.26	11	34	-69.44%	
Latvia	1.04	20	26	-23.08%	0.1
Estonia	0.98	13	103	-87.50%	0.2
Hungary	0.70	68	155	-56.41%	0.2

Passenger numbers have already begun to rise noticeably, and the DAA anticipates passenger volumes through Dublin Airport will increase significantly. Several airlines have already begun to increase their capacity through larger planes or greater numbers of flights. Of note is Ryanair's intention to increase its number of flights from 85 per week on 21 June (previously 56 per week) to 360 per week on 1 July. Increased numbers of imported cases are expected, which will pose a significant public health risk if controls are not put in place.

The Department of Health has undertaken extensive work and detailed consultation with other relevant Departments and the Attorney General's Office to address legal, enforcement and other issues in relation to a proposal: introduction of a legal requirement for passengers arriving to the State from higher risk countries to restrict their movements for 14 days to the address provided on the passenger locator form. Such a legal regime would help to facilitate an all-island approach to managing the spread of Covid-19 and be broadly in line with the regime applying in Northern Ireland since 8 June.

The proposal for a legal requirement to restrict movement arises because of the recognised shortcomings of alternative options involving screening or testing (and the proposal is more proportionate than mandatory self-isolation). Testing arriving passengers is not considered an effective control as COVID-19 tests are point in time tests and confer no guarantee that the person is not incubating the virus below detectable levels. Consideration is being given to the potential for using testing as a complement to mandatory restricted movement.

Passenger Locator Form

Since 28 May, it has been a legal requirement for passengers arriving to Ireland from overseas to complete a Covid-19 Passenger Locator Form. Incoming passengers are advised but not required to self-isolate for 14 days. There are several groups of people who are exempt from completing the form, these include but are not limited to; passengers arriving from Northern Ireland, holders of a Certificate for International Transport Workers, drivers of heavy good vehicles and other personnel who are in the State in the course of their duties.

Follow up calls

At present, follow up calls are conducted by the Border Management Unit of the Department of Justice, with between 57% and 67% of calls being answered. BMU has limited capacity to make calls and will move to a spot check system until the HSE is due to take over this responsibility in mid-July.

25 June Government Decisions on international travel

A Memorandum to Government on 25 June by Department of Taoiseach featured a number of decisions sought, including:

- *A Roadmap for Safe Overseas Access will be prepared, in consultation with relevant stakeholders including public health authorities, ports and airports, and the travel industry;*
- *A list of countries with broadly comparable epidemiological situations to Ireland's will be drawn up, based on an agreed EU method for comparing countries, in respect of which current travel restrictions will be eased;*
- *A set of safety protocols to be applied in ports and airports, and on planes and ferries, will be prepared and implemented, and will include consideration of appropriate testing arrangements;*
- *an expanded range of exemptions will be developed, including for particular categories of workers, to apply where travel restrictions remain applicable;*
- *There will be no change to current policy in respect of travel to or from Northern Ireland;*
- *The target date for implementation of these measures will be 9 July.*

A meeting tomorrow of the Special Cabinet Committee on Covid-19 Response is being arranged to consider matters relating to overseas travel.

Table 2 Green list ordered by 14 days incidence today and yesterday

Date Reported	Countries And Territories	Incidence 14 days	Cases 14 days	Cases prev 14 days	Percentage change
30/06/2020	Montenegro	28.12682	175	1	8650
30/06/2020	Serbia	27.58566	1921	880	105.016
30/06/2020	Canada	12.75292	4771	7082	-35.8909
30/06/2020	Morocco	9.464856	3452	901	243.4826
30/06/2020	Algeria	5.899698	2540	1406	67.32543
30/06/2020	Rwanda	3.080715	389	205	65.53191
30/06/2020	Ireland	2.875063	141	241	-45.5598
30/06/2020	Uruguay	2.426532	84	23	265.2174
30/06/2020	Australia	1.714068	432	116	229.771
30/06/2020	South_Korea	1.259143	645	580	5.04886
30/06/2020	Georgia	1.225992	49	83	-40.9639
30/06/2020	Japan	0.792998	1006	572	53.12024
30/06/2020	Tunisia	0.530154	62	12	138.4615
30/06/2020	New_Zealand	0.459956	22	0	1000
30/06/2020	Thailand	0.051705	36	53	-32.0755
30/06/2020	China	0.028038	402	181	79.46429

