

**NPHEP paper on advising Government in relation to the reintroduction of
public health restrictive measures for certain counties**

7 August 2020

DRAFT UNDER DELIBERATION

Action required

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

1. Introduction

The NPHE agreed a Framework for Future COVID-19 Pandemic Response on 23 July 2020. The Framework sets out four phases of response to COVID-19 based on level of risk, and details a series of indicators and priority actions for each phase.

The Orange Phase response is defined in the Framework as follows: For times when risk is greater, there is an increasing incidence of disease with multiple clusters and/or increased community transmission, and the pandemic is ongoing and escalating in Ireland and globally.

For the Orange Phase, the Framework sets out a range of possible public health measures, some or all of which may need to be applied, adjusted as the epidemiological and public health scenario requires, on a local, regional or national basis. The Framework further specifies that responses can occur at the micro- (local), meso-(regional or sector-specific), and macro- (national) levels.

The indicators identified for an orange phase response (to be considered collectively and in context to guide judgement and decision-making) are as follows:

- Multiple clusters, with secondary spread
- 14-day cumulative incidence and related indicators show significant or increasing level of disease
- Indicators of viral transmission (including the number of cases, positivity rate and reproduction number) indicate community transmission no longer effectively suppressed
- Incidence of cases in residential healthcare settings increasing
- Admissions to hospital and critical care increasing
- Number of deaths increasing
- Capacity to undertake testing and contact tracing constrained in the context of current demand

2. Current Epidemiological Situation

Recent updates provided at meetings of 4th and 6th August refer. A further update will be provided at the meeting.

3. International Situation

The European Centre for Disease Control regularly publishes Rapid Risk Assessments of COVID-19 for the EU27+UK. Their 11th update is due to be published on Monday (10th) and a draft has been circulated to Member States in advance. This update advises that Europe is seeing an increase in the number of cases and hospitalisations recently after a decline in those figures in May-June 2020 and subsequent relaxation of measures in many countries.

While the update shows that, as of the 2nd August, Ireland (7.3/100,000 population) has a relatively low incidence rate as compared to other countries in Europe and the European average (21.5/100,000 population), there has been a significant increase in cases in Ireland in recent days.

The draft risk assessment advises that *“Countries that now observe an increase in cases after they have lifted their control measures following a temporary improvement of the epidemiological situation,*

should consider re-instating selected measures through a phased, step-wise and sustainable approach. Assessment of risk at local level is important, taking into consideration the epidemiological situation, local services and lessons learned regarding the impact of previous measures.”

It further advises that “*In EU/EEA countries and the UK that have reported a recent increase in cases:*

*The risk of further escalation of COVID-19 is **high** in countries that have also had an increase in hospitalisations providing a strong indication that there is a genuine increase in transmission occurring. For these countries, the overall risk of escalation is **very high** if they do not implement or reinforce multiple measures including physical distancing measures and contact tracing and have sufficient testing capacity.*

*The risk of further escalation of COVID-19 is **high** for the countries reporting no increase in hospitalisations but have an increase in test positivity rates (if testing capacity is sufficient and intensity has remained stable), suggesting increasing levels of transmission. For these countries, the overall risk of escalation is **very high** if they do not implement or reinforce multiple measures including physical distancing measures and contact tracing.*

*The risk of further escalation of COVID-19 is **moderate-high** for the countries reporting no increase in hospitalisations or test positivity rates (if testing capacity is sufficient and intensity has remained stable). The countries that have multiple physical distancing measures in place should conduct local risk assessments to better understand the groups or settings driving the increase in cases and to determine which the measures should be in place or strengthened.*

It is further noted that internationally, in particular in countries which have seen significant increases in cases of COVID-19 infection, including outbreaks in some settings and regions following the easing of public health measures, there has been a re-imposition of public health restrictive measures in those countries and / or regions of those countries.

4. Measures for Consideration by NPHET

Drawing on the Framework for Future COVID-19 Pandemic Response, and in light of the current epidemiological situation in certain parts of the country, most recent ECDC advice, and the key priorities of resuming non-COVID health and social care services and reopening the education sector, the NPHET may wish to discuss and give consideration to advising Government to implement the following **measures in Kildare, Laois and Offaly for two weeks**, at which point the situation will be reviewed:

- Travel to be restricted to within county, other than for the following reasons:
 - to travel to and from work, or for purposes of work and where that work cannot be done from home;
 - to attend medical appointments and collect medicines and other health products;
 - for vital family reasons, such as providing care to children, elderly or vulnerable people, but excluding social family visits;
 - for farming purposes i.e. food production and/or care of animal;
 - for one initial journey to return home / depart the county;

- No travel into the specified counties, other than for exemptions (as above);
- All indoor gatherings including all types of household, private, family or social indoor gatherings of people to be restricted to a maximum of 6 people from outside the household, while maintaining physical distancing
- Outdoor gatherings to be limited to a maximum of 15 people, while maintaining physical distancing;
- No sporting events or matches to take place, with the following exemptions:
 - non-contact training in a maximum group of 15 people may continue
 - professional sports & inter-county training and fixtures may continue behind closed doors;
- All cafes and restaurants (including bars operating as restaurants) will be required to limit supply to take-away food or delivery and / or outdoor dining (with strict physical distancing);
- All theatres, betting shops, bingo halls, gyms, leisure centres, swimming pools, exercise and dance studios will be required to close;
- People should not use public transport unless it is absolutely necessary to do so;
- Attendance at a funeral service and burial /cremation ceremony to be limited to 25 (indoor events connected to the funeral will be limited to a maximum of 6 people);
- Places of worship to remain open for private prayer, while services will move online;
- The over 70s and medically vulnerable will be advised to exercise individual judgement, and to stay at home as much as possible, and limit interactions to a very small network for short periods of time, while remaining physically distanced. They will also be advised to:
 - If taking exercise outdoors, maintain 2 metre distance from others and wash hands on returning home;
 - avoid public transport;
 - In relation to shopping, they should shop during designated hours and wear a face covering. Family, friends and neighbours may be able to provide assistance with shopping once they adhere to physical distancing guidelines, alternatively, online services may be considered;
 - Shops should ensure that there are designated hours for over 70s and medically vulnerable;
 - For those for whom these options are not available, Government should put in place assistance through Local Authorities, working with the voluntary sector services, to ensure that people have access to food, essential household supplies and medicines;
- Restrictions of visiting in long-term residential care facilities, acute settings and prisons;

- All businesses to ensure that employees are working from home and are not required to enter or leave the specified regions, where possible;
- It is proposed that the following services should remain open with appropriate protective measures in place:
 - Education and childcare
 - Outdoor playgrounds, play areas, parks
 - All retail and personal services.
- Individuals across the country should continue to adopt the behaviours that will protect themselves and others and will interrupt the transmission of the virus:
 - Frequent handwashing; cough and sneeze etiquette, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth, regularly cleaning and disinfecting surfaces
 - Keep a safe distance of 2 metres from other people, especially those not among your close contacts
 - Minimise your number of close contacts as much as possible and keep a record of your daily contacts in order to facilitate rapid contact tracing if you are diagnosed with COVID-19
 - Wear a face covering when using public transport, in retail settings or any other indoor setting where physical distancing cannot be maintained
 - Know and self-monitor for the symptoms of COVID-19, if you have symptoms, self-isolate and contact your GP without delay
 - Download the COVID Tracker App
 - Stay informed through trusted information sources and follow official public health advice
- Regarding specific measures targeted at economic activity and vulnerable groups, NPHEP reiterates its recommendations of the 4th August 2020.