



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

Enhancing The Framework for Future COVID-19 Pandemic Response

NPHET

3rd September 2020

The NPHET agreed a Framework for Future COVID-19 Pandemic Response on 23 July 2020 and this was submitted to Government for consideration.



The Framework has four phases of response based on level of risk

Yellow Phase	For times when the risk is medium. During these times there is low incidence of disease with isolated clusters, low community transmission, though the pandemic is still ongoing, in Ireland and globally.
Orange Phase	for times when risk is greater. During these times there is increasing incidence of disease with multiple clusters, increased community transmission, the pandemic ongoing and escalating, in Ireland and globally.
Red Phase	for times when the risk is greatest. During these times, there is high or rapidly increasing incidence, widespread community transmission and the pandemic ongoing and escalating rapidly, in Ireland and globally.
Blue Phase	when the emergency response has been stood down. There are no cases in Ireland or there has been widespread vaccination, if a vaccine has become available. The pandemic has been declared over, globally and in Ireland. During this phase there is a focus on future preparedness.

Each phase sets out a series of priority actions to be undertaken



By the public – Individually and collectively

Across the health sector at national and regional/local level

Across Government at national and regional/local level, with an emphasis on devolution of responsibility for planning and activation of those plans, when appropriate

The Orange Phase 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 resurgence of disease in specific settings may require specific sectoral responses over and above those set out in the Framework.
- ❖ The suite of public health measures proposed is indicative only.
- ❖ The precise set of measures utilised at any time will be informed by the profile of the disease and the underlying context of transmission at that time

Government has committed to publishing a Roadmap for Recovery and Resilience by 13th September which will incorporate NPHET advice and also take account of broader cross Government considerations

Lessons learned from the introduction of the most recent measures



- The Orange Phase allows for a more **nuanced approach** to the application of measures and has enabled the introduction of differing levels of restrictions in the three counties and nationwide in line with the differing profile of disease, as had been the intention.
- This did however require NPHEC to make a **series of decisions on individual measures from the “menu”** on the day which can present challenges in ensuring **clarity, consistency and coherence** across the full set of measures recommended.
- Having such an open approach, also means that there isn't as much clarity as there could be for Government and society as a whole as to **what different stages of orange phase will entail, making communications more difficult**.
- Selecting a series of coherent and impactful measures as part of the orange phase response isn't easy. There has been **confusion and perceived inconsistencies** in what was deemed to be safe/acceptable and what was not. **Further efforts are needed to more clearly define and articulate the rationale underpinning decisions.**
- The task of **striking a balance between having a coherent and understandable framework of measures against the risk of being overly prescriptive** in areas outside of public health expertise is challenging.
- Currently the yellow phase of the Framework provides for **Gov Depts/sectors to develop sector specific plans for orange and red phase**. It will be important that these are put in place quickly within the context of an overarching Framework, and draw on the experience of recent restrictions.



- It is not possible to develop guidance for every activity and some things do not fall neatly into a particular category or sector. However, there may be merit in re-emphasising some of the **basic messages around controlled environments and risk mitigation measures** that can provide a basic guidance framework.
- The **importance of the appropriate inspection and enforcement** of measures is widely accepted and continues to be a matter of discussion across government. The most recent regulations assigning additional powers were signed on 31st Aug.
- Questions remain as to **when and how Phase 4 measures can be fully introduced:**
 - The safe reopening of “wet” pubs and bars and what guidance should apply to this sector specifically.** There has been much public debate regarding the continued closure of pubs/bars and consideration may be needed as to when and how to open these venues, what capacity limits to set and what additional measures are required given the associated risks.
 - Consideration is needed in relation to what guidance should be in place to support the safe facilitation of **larger gatherings in fixed purpose event facilities**

Looking at international responses, we have learned that Ireland is not an outlier in its approach.....



- A number of countries have introduced **Recovery Plans or Alert Systems** that contain a number of phases or alert levels (range from 3 – 5) e.g. Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Canadian Provinces.
- While a number of response plans have been presented as “exit strategies”, **there are mechanisms in place for moving forwards and backwards through the phases of reopening.**
- Many have had to **reintroduce restrictive measures, though these have tended to be regional** and local rather than national e.g. England, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Scotland. A key feature of these has been **the speed with which the decisions were taken and measures implemented.**
- While there is **no universal agreement on the safest number of people to allow to meet for small house gatherings**, other countries have set similar limits e.g. Scotland (6), N.I. (6), the Netherlands (6), Tasmania (5). The focus has been to **reduce the number of people congregating.**

Some key guiding principles



- No environment/activity is risk free.
- We **have to prioritise some activities over others** including health and social care services, education and other essential needs e.g. supermarkets.
- In as far as possible, we also want to protect work and economic activity, and other key societal interests such as sports and important family events such as weddings and funerals.
- To do this, we **need to limit congregation in activities that are more discretionary in nature**, so that these priorities can be protected.

- In explaining the rationale behind trade-offs, there **needs to be a better articulation of the drivers of risk:**
 - ❑ **The environment in which activity/contact is taking place** – measures can be taken to make environments more controlled which reduces risk
 - ❑ **The nature of the event/gathering and attendees** – if everyone knows each other (extended family gatherings), there is less likelihood of physical distancing being maintained.
 - ❑ **The level of virus at a given point in time** – while the above two factors may remain constant i.e. controlled environment/gathering, the risk of infection is greater in periods of higher levels of transmission so numbers congregating needs to be curtailed.
 - ❑ **Outdoors is safer than indoors.** But the associated activities around outdoor gatherings, which can lead to risk of congregation (e.g. travel to/from event, entry/exit etc) must be factored in to considerations.

There is now an opportunity to consider how the current Framework could be enhanced to ensure that it is clear, consistent and implementable.....



Key Discussion Points

Please see accompanying table of measures for what we are proposing. They are broadly equivalent to the current Framework measures and the recently introduced measures at regional and national level with some suggested changes (marked in red)– in light of lessons learned.

Orange Phase approach:

- It is proposed that the **Orange phase could be split into 3 levels** to provide more clarity and consistency and ease decision making.
- It is proposed that these levels could be **broadly based on the recent measures** taken nationally and in Kildare, Laois and Offaly, **with some adjustments** (in red) based on learning i.e. a “light” orange and “mid” orange level. The final orange level would be based on the full set of orange measures set out in the Framework.
- Light Orange measures: **reduce congregation to reduce opportunities for transmission** – both in private homes and also in a range of other discretionary social/recreational activities. It seeks to allow a broad range of activities to proceed but in limited groups/pods.
- Mid orange measures: reduce congregation but also **to contain further spread** by limiting movement if appropriate (i.e. within county) and stopping some economic and societal activities (restaurants and arts/cultural facilities closed, and sporting events stopped)
- Full orange: **Significant containment measures** involving limited movement and closure of all activity bar essential.
- The current Framework sets a continuum of disease indicators for yellow, orange and red phases. It is not proposed to specify differentiated sets of indicators for the three proposed orange levels. Rather the current orange indicators will apply across the three levels. Depending on the disease profile and the particular circumstances and local/regional or national context, NPHE will apply judgement as to which level should be most appropriately recommended on each occasion.



Key Discussion Points:

- It is proposed that in a **typical situation, “wet pubs” would be open in Level 1 and 2**. However, given the nature of the current epidemiological situation and the recent reopening of schools– it is **deemed inappropriate to reopen them at present**. Rather, it is proposed that **they reopen when there has been a period of at least 2 weeks of stabilisation** in the disease trajectory.
- A number of **safeguards would need to be in place** to support the safe reopening of pubs and bars, it is proposed that current sectoral guidance is reviewed to take account of international best practice. This could include:
 - Maximum capacity limits
 - Keeping background noise (e.g. TV, music) to a minimum
 - Not allowing live music or dancing
 - Measures around queueing, entrance/exit, toilet facilities, sanitisation, ventilation
- There are a small number of large purpose-built event facilities (venues/stadia e.g. Croke Park, Aviva, RDS, Three Arena, Convention Centre) where it may be possible to have **larger gatherings safely**. It is proposed that a process of engagement is put in place by the relevant Departments/sectors to consider this. The following key areas should be addressed:
 - The safe management of entry, exits and communal areas
 - Methods of transport used to attend the events
 - Maximum capacity