



12<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Mr Simon Harris T.D.  
Minister for Health  
Miesian Plaza  
Dublin 2

Dear Minister

Following the press briefing of 11<sup>th</sup> March which set out the need for enhancements to Ireland's containment phase, the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) met at 9pm last night to discuss further notifications of COVID-19 by the National Virus Reference Laboratory.

The NPHE now recommends that Ireland moves to a delay phase.

In making this recommendation the NPHE noted that Ireland has now seen:

- (i) a significant increase in recent days in the number of cases detected
- (ii) a number of ICU hospitalisations
- (iii) a death
- (iv) a number of clusters of infection including in two hospital settings and
- (v) reports of community transmission in a number of individual cases.

The NPHE also took into account the advice of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control published yesterday, 11<sup>th</sup> March that:

- (i) the detection of COVID-19 cases and/or deaths outside of known chains of transmission is a strong signal that social distancing measures should be considered and
- (ii) the early, decisive, rapid, coordinated and comprehensive implementation of closures and quarantines is likely to be more effective in slowing the spread of the virus than a delayed implementation.

The NPHE now recommends the following measures to attenuate the spread of symptoms of COVID -19:

1. Individuals who have symptoms should self-isolate for a period of 14 days.
2. Individuals should reduce discretionary social contacts as much as possible.
3. Elderly and/or medically vulnerable people should reduce as much as possible contacts outside home.
4. There should be no mass gatherings:
  - a. involving more than 100 people if located indoors
  - b. involving more than 500 people if located outdoors.
5. Closure of museums, galleries and tourism sites.
6. Closure of schools, creches, other childcare facilities and higher education institutions.
7. Reduction of workplace contacts where possible and implementation of remote working practices and teleconferencing where possible and not to travel for meetings. Work times and break times should be staggered, where possible.

8. Restriction of visiting at hospitals, long term care settings, mental health facilities, prisons, and spacing measures in homeless shelters.

The NPHEt further recommends that these measures should be introduced from Friday 13 March until Sunday 29 March 2020. The NPHEt will keep the impact of these measures under review.

The NPHEt agreed that it is critically important that the health sector should greatly strengthen contact tracing, surveillance and necessary public health actions in addition to the range of measures approved by the Cabinet Committee on Covid-19 last Monday 9 March.

The NPHEt will continue to advise on necessary actions and in particular, will give further consideration to travel and related measures at its meeting this evening.

Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Holohan', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Tony Holohan

Chief Medical Officer

Chair of NPHEt

c.c. Elizabeth Canavan, Chair of Senior Officials Group on COVID-19