



Mr. Simon Harris TD,
Minister for Health,
Department of Health,
Miesian Plaza,
50-58 Lower Baggot Street,
Dublin 2.

24th March 2020

Via email to Private Secretary to the Minister for Health

Dear Minister,

Arising from the meeting of the COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) which concluded this morning, 24 March 2020, I wish to bring to your attention the following decisions and actions agreed by NPHE:

1. The NPHE recommends adopting the World Health Organisation case definition as of 23rd March 2020. HSE to update the relevant guidance and algorithms and publish these online.
2. The HSE to put in place measures to increase testing capacity in line with the updated case definition.
3. The NPHE recommends self-isolation for all suspect and confirmed cases (including those who are awaiting a test or test result) and restriction of movement for their household contacts.
4. The HSE to revert to the NPHE with a description of the contact tracing process in use in line with current policy.

Ireland's situation is now such that -

- i. The number of confirmed cases exceeds 1000,
- ii. There is a day on day increase in the number of admissions to ICU,
- iii. There have been six deaths recorded,
- iv. Community transmission accounts for 45% of cases,
- v. 25% of cases are associated with healthcare workers,
- vi. There are a number of clusters in healthcare and residential settings.

The existence and course of widespread community transmission throughout Europe and many parts of the world was also noted by the NPHE.

In addition, the NPHE undertook a review of existing policy (letter of 12th March refers), and the related public health measures currently in place which was informed by the guidance on social distancing measures from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, published 23rd March 2020.

It is notable, and most welcome, that the measures introduced to date have met with widespread public understanding and support. Nevertheless, given the factors outlined above with regard to the spread of COVID-19 in Ireland and internationally, the NPHET is of the opinion that additional measures are now necessary. The positive engagement of the public to date gives grounds for confidence that these augmented measures will also meet with general support.

The NPHET now recommends augmenting the existing public health measures, in line with this latest guidance, with the following:

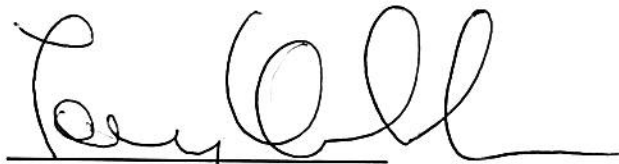
- All theatres, clubs, gyms/leisure centres, hairdressers, betting shops, marts, markets, casinos, bingo halls, libraries and other similar outlets are to close;
- All hotels to limit occupancy to essential non-social and non-tourist reasons;
- All non-essential retail outlets are to close to members of the public and all other retail outlets are to implement social distancing;
- All cafes and restaurants are to limit supply to take-away food or delivery and implement social distancing measures in respect of queuing;
- All sporting events are to be cancelled, including those behind closed doors;
- All playgrounds and holiday/caravan parks are to close;
- All places of worship are to restrict numbers entering at any one time to ensure adequate social distancing;
- Significantly raise the amount of money available on cashless card transactions;
- All organised social indoor or outdoor events of any size are not to take place;
- Social distancing, in as far as is practicable, is to be ensured between the clients/patients in confined settings, such as:
 - long-term care facilities, either for the elderly or persons with special needs;
 - psychiatric institutions;
 - homeless shelters;
 - prisons.
- Measures applicable to public transport include:
 - cleaning schedules on public transport are to be improved;
 - people should not use public transport unless it is absolutely necessary;
 - transport companies are to apply social distancing measures and limit the numbers permitted on public transport at any one time.
- Gardaí are to increase interventions where venues/outlets are not in compliance with, or where groups of people are not adhering to recommended social distancing measures;
- All household contacts of a suspect case (i.e. a person who is awaiting a test or test result) should restrict movements until the test is reported negative or for 14 days, whichever is shorter);
- Individuals should work from home unless workplace attendance is essential;
- Social gatherings of individuals outdoors should be no more than four persons, unless all are from the same household;
- All non-essential indoor visits to other persons' homes should be avoided;
- All crowded places, including public amenities, should be avoided;
- All scheduled cruise ship travel to cease.

The NPHET further recommends that the existing and these additional measures are extended until Sunday, 19th April 2020 and will be kept under continuing review as to whether further measures may be required.

Officials from this Department have been and will continue to be available to work with relevant HSE staff and other health agency staff on the implementation of these actions.

I would be happy to discuss further, should you wish.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Holohan', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer

Chair of the COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency Team

c.c. Ms Elizabeth Canavan, Department of the Taoiseach and Chair of the Senior Officials Group for COVID-19