

## National Public Health Emergency Team - Coronavirus

### Covid -19 Subgroup – Behavioural Change

#### Meeting 9

#### Note of Meeting

**Meeting Date:** Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2020

**Time:** 14:00

**Location:** Video Conference

#### **In attendance:**

##### Department of Health:

Kate O’Flaherty (Chair), Health and Wellbeing

Robert Mooney, Communications

Robert Murphy, Research Services and Policy

Greg Straton, Health and Wellbeing (Secretariat)

ESRI: Pete Lunn

UCD: Liam Delaney

SEAI: Karl Purcell

Safefood: Aileen McGloin

NUIG: Molly Byrne

UL: Orla Muldoon

Guest Presenter – Agenda Item No.8: Dublin Airport Authority: Ruan Dillon-McLoughlin

#### **1. Welcome**

The Chairperson welcomed the members to the Subgroup meeting

#### **2. Conflict of Interest Declarations**

None declared

#### **3. Meeting Note – Meeting 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2020**

The meeting note of the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2020 was agreed

#### **4. Update from NPHE – Kate O’Flaherty**

The announcement of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business was made by Government on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, setting out the broad public health framework approach to reducing public health social distancing measures, and the framework for future decision-making. Current restrictions, with adjustments to the limit for exercise from 2km to 5km and advice for people cocooning that they can go outdoors under certain conditions to maintain

their safety, will continue until 18<sup>th</sup> May. An ongoing focus of the work will be towards planning for future easing of restrictions. The establishment of a Special Committee on Covid-19 Response by the Oireachtas was noted.

There was a discussion that whilst the focus of the Subgroup will continue to be around the easing of restrictions in line with the Roadmap, it would also be important to consider how to prepare for question of the re-introduction of measures in the event of resurgence of the virus and to ensure the continued support of key behaviours in the medium term. It was noted that while people may respond negatively to any ‘stepping back’ of measures, as losses are felt more keenly than gains, there may be other behavioural factors to consider, including potential positives in terms of the ability for rapid response given the levels of awareness and experience in compliance with measures.

### **5. Insights from the Week -Rob Mooney**

A report was circulated to the Subgroup prior to the meeting for consideration. During the week the results of online surveys indicate a significant reduction in overall worry, stress and anxiety amongst the general population. It was discussed that this may be the result of the announcement of lifting of restrictions being better than what was expected and that risk perceptions may have shifted. There are also indications that whilst media engagement remains high that people are accessing less information, this may require a campaign refresh, with messaging that is especially relevant to the upcoming phases.

### **6. Solidarity and Adherence – Orla Muldoon**

A presentation on a paper was circulated to the Subgroup in advance of the meeting. The study looked at public messaging throughout the Covid-19 response, which takes an explicit and implicit national solidarity approach, and explored evidence of differences in prototypicality, national solidarity and adherence between ethnic groups (Irish, immigrants, Travellers) and implications for public messaging.

The importance of public health messages framing to be inclusive, in order to sustain solidarity and support adherence was highlighted, and the need to take care to create an image of a diverse and inclusive national group that acknowledges this diversity, will enhance message effectiveness. It was agreed that a short guide on how to incorporate these findings into communications could be useful.

### **7. Updates on Ongoing Work**

#### **(a) BRU Update – Pete Lunn**

The BRU are presently working on the design and research questions for the pretesting of the Covid Tracking App. A draft paper on some of the findings from the most recent BRU study was circulated to the Subgroup prior to the meeting. This study explored study public expectations and attitudes around lifting of restrictions and suggest that the public expect restrictions to continue for a substantial period of time into the future, while men in general were more optimistic than women about the timeframe for easing restrictions. The study also found that people in general prioritised an easing of restrictions that would be collectively beneficial, rather than measures that they might personally prefer, underscoring the ongoing

willingness of a majority of people to make sacrifices for the common good over a substantial time period.

**(b) DBEI Survey – Karl Purcell**

The pilot of the survey has been completed. The group discussed technical issues around sampling and survey roll-out. The survey will be launched in the coming week and will close on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May.

**8. Dublin Airport Authority Presentation (3pm) – Ruan Dillon-McLoughlin**

Ruan Dillon-McLoughlin, Head of Behavioural Strategy at DAA gave a brief presentation on the behavioural insights and approaches being considered as part of the planning for future operation. The group discussion included insights around developing communications to the public on the likely ‘new normal’ behaviours and re-designing the physical environment and processes to enable public health advice to be adhered to.

**9. Mental Health and Wellbeing**

It was noted by the Subgroup that the CSO were due to publish survey findings on the social impact of Covid-19, including in relation to wellbeing, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May. There was a discussion around the breadth of research that is now taking place to look at Covid issues, including wellbeing and other issues of interest to the group, including new research projects funded through HRB. The group will consider further the linkages between various research projects in thinking of future research needs, including the behavioural factors related to enabling, or hindering, people to sustain behaviours.

**10. Face Coverings/Masks Use by the Public**

The subgroup discussed potential behavioural issues around guidance on face coverings/masks and noted recent evidence and recommendations around that from other jurisdictions. The issue of potential risk compensation was discussed, and the group noted there was a lack of evidence to determine whether it would affect compliance with other measures. The importance of effective communication of guidance on appropriate and correct use, cleaning/disposal and practical instructions, was discussed. The group also noted the importance of how new guidance is communicated in the context of the broader ‘toolkit’ of behaviours.

Noting that non-compliance with guidance will be very obvious and visible, and particularly if a key message is that you wear one to protect others, there is potential for a psychological cost of non-compliance with implications in terms of stigma or social cohesion. The social norms created around adherence will likely be an important factor. The issues around affordability/accessibility would play in here also if these were factors in non-compliance. If guidance for wearing was around particular environments, such as in public transport, it would be important to consider how that environment could be designed/set up to enable compliance.

**11. Micro Communities**

The topic of ‘micro-communities’, as referenced in the framework for future measures, was discussed by the Subgroup. This concept aims to support work to be conducted and for social interaction to promote wellbeing, while still limiting the spread of infection. A small number of other countries have introduced specific guidance around the concept. It was recognised that

such a measure could have a significant positive impact to people's wellbeing from being able to safely enjoy the physical company of important others outside their household.

However, it was generally felt that that the issue of 'exclusivity' could have a negative impact on people's level of wellbeing and overall feeling of social cohesion. It was also generally felt that it would be quite complicated to develop and communicate a 'ruleset' around a 'bubble' or similar construct, given the diversity of households and the types of variables to be considered. The group's initial advice was that going back to the basics of the rationale, ie encouraging people to limit social interactions and mixing, and providing high-level advice that was as simple and intuitive as possible on that as we move through phases, as well as being explicit about the desired behaviours and the trade-offs involved, might be a more effective approach.

## **12. A.O.B**

None

## **12. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Next meeting:

2pm – Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2020