

**National Public Health Emergency Team - Coronavirus**

**Covid -19 Subgroup – Behavioural Change**

**Meeting 16**

**Note of Meeting**

**Meeting Date:** Friday 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2020

**Time:** 10:30

**Location:** Video Conference

**In attendance:**

Department of Health:

Kate O’Flaherty (Chair), Health and Wellbeing

Greg Straton, Health and Wellbeing (Secretariat)

ESRI: Deirdre Robertson (alternate for Pete Lunn)

NUIG: Molly Byrne

SEAI: Karl Purcell

UCD: Liam Delaney

UL: Orla Muldoon

Guest Presentation: Shane Timmons (ESRI)

Apologies:

Safefood: Aileen McGloin

DoH:

Robert Mooney,

Robert Murphy

ESRI: Pete Lunn

**1. Welcome**

The Chairperson welcomed the members to the Subgroup meeting and noted the apologies of Aileen McGloin, Robert Mooney, Robert Murphy and Pete Lunn. It was additionally noted that Deirdre Robertson (ESRI BRU) was attending the meeting on behalf of Pete Lunn and that her colleague Shane Timmons would join the meeting to present findings for item 6(a) .

**2. Conflict of Interest Declarations**

None declared

### **3. Meeting Note – Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2020 and 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2020**

The meeting note of the 12<sup>th</sup> of June was accepted; it was agreed to recirculate the meeting note of the 24<sup>th</sup> of June for further review.

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

NPHET are presently preparing a framework for the future Covid-19 pandemic response. In addition, the work on the future structures and processes of NPHET is also ongoing. The Chair also updated in relation to recent developments in cases and travel advice.

### **5. Insights from the Week – Kate O’Flaherty**

The recent tracker survey data on the use of face coverings was shared with the Subgroup prior to the meeting. A discussion on the accuracy of self-reported adherence of the wearing of face coverings was held by the group, and advice was provided to the Department’s Communications Unit to further improve data collection and interpretation, as well as the ongoing communications strategy on this issue.

### **6. Updates on Ongoing Work**

#### **(a) BRU Update**

The meeting was joined by Shane Timmons of the ESRI BRU who presented the findings of research into the study on symptom recognition and decision-making by individuals to self-isolate. A sample of 1,000 individuals were recruited for the study. The study was conducted in four stages, the first phase looked at symptom recognition with different combinations, including the main symptoms of Covid-19, cold and flu symptoms and unrelated symptoms and the predisposition of respondents to call their GP. The second phase examined the impact of additional factors on the decision to self-isolate, this occurred via a series of vignettes and looked to see if a casual narrative would impact on decision making. The third stage looked at the comprehension of individuals of the tracing and testing process if they had Covid-19 symptoms. Finally, the fourth stage was a list type experiment testing overall compliance with measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The overall results of the study include:

- Recognition of cold and flu symptoms is low and is closer to non-associated symptoms than main Covid-19 symptoms.
- The severity of symptoms is important in deciding to self-isolate. In addition, if respondents had a non-associated symptom this may delay self-isolation or contacting a GP.
- Even with severe, or two or more, Covid-19 symptoms, 1 in 4 report being unlikely to immediately call their GP
- Men, less educated, younger and non-Irish are least likely to call their GP with main Covid-19 symptoms
- Being able to think of a cause of infection (and no alternative) is an important factor in deciding to self-isolate, even independent of symptoms. This is especially true if there is an awareness of a close contact of a confirmed case. There is a potential need to communicate the need for people to make contact with their GP even if they can’t think of how they may have become infected.

- Large minority of individuals are unaware that the GP assessment and test is free and may have an impact on rapidity of up-take of this process, the test cost is associated with willingness to call a GP.
- Few respondents were aware that a tracing centre would make contact via a private number.
- There may be an emerging issue of stigma relating to becoming infected and infecting others.
- Tracking surveys may overestimate compliance with prevention measures (wearing face coverings, hand washing, cough and sneeze etiquette and physical distancing) by at least 10%

The group discussed the study findings, and agreed that there were a number of implications for further public communication and education initiatives, including messaging that it's free to call GP/get a test; messaging that you should call your GP even if you don't think there is a reason it could be Covid (let the GP help you decide), and messaging about potential impact on a vulnerable person

The finding that people more willing to get tested if they've been a contact may support how that system communicates when it calls people. The point was also made that while many of our other messages are 'prevention', this is different in that it's an 'intervention' message, so may need a different approach and focussing on motivating action with the collective in mind, and that this is part of how we 'live with Covid' There was a view that too much focus on individual responsibility could be stigmatising, that we need to constantly remind there is no shame in getting Covid. The point was also raised that we need to acknowledge how difficult self-isolation is.

## **9. A.O.B**

- The potential contribution of behavioural insights to support the planning for resumption of health services was raised, and it was noted that the expertise of the group could be offered in that regard. The Chair undertook to follow up.
- The Chair mentioned that an overview report on the work of the Subgroup was being prepared for NPHET, this will be circulated for input to the Subgroup in the coming week.

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

Next meeting: The secretariat of the Subgroup undertook to identify a meeting date and time during the week of the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2020.