



National Public Health Emergency Team – COVID-19
Meeting Note – Standing meeting

Date and Time	Monday 17th August 2020, (Meeting 48) at 3:00pm
Location	Department of Health, Miesian Plaza, Dublin 2
Chair	Dr Ronan Glynn, Acting Chief Medical Officer, DOH
Members via videoconference	Prof Philip Nolan, President, National University of Ireland, Maynooth and Chair of the Irish Epidemiological Modelling Advisory Group (IEMAG) Dr Cillian de Gascun, Laboratory Director, NVRL and Expert Advisory Group (EAG) Chair Dr Lorraine Doherty, National Clinical Director Health Protection, HSE Dr Máirín Ryan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of HTA, HIQA Dr John Cuddihy, Interim Director, HSE HPSC Prof Colm Bergin, Consultant in Infectious Diseases, St James's Hospital Dr Michael Power, Consultant in Anaesthetics / Intensive Care Medicine, Beaumont Hospital Dr Siobhán Ní Bhriain, Lead for Integrated Care, HSE Dr Eibhlín Connolly, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, DOH Dr Mary Favier, President, Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP) Mr David Leach, Communications, HSE Dr Siobhán O'Sullivan, Chief Bioethics Officer, DOH Dr Colette Bonner, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, DOH Mr Colm Desmond, Assistant Secretary, Corporate Legislation, Mental Health, Drugs Policy and Food Safety Division, DOH Ms Yvonne O'Neill, National Director, Community Operations, HSE Mr Phelim Quinn, Chief Executive Officer, HIQA Dr Kevin Kelleher, Assistant National Director, Public Health, HSE Ms Kate O'Flaherty, Head of Health and Wellbeing, DOH Dr Breda Smyth, Public Health Specialist, HSE Dr Kathleen MacLellan, Assistant Secretary, Social Care Division, DOH Dr Colm Henry, Chief Clinical Officer (CCO), HSE Mr Fergal Goodman, Assistant Secretary, Primary Care Division, DOH Mr Paul Bolger, Director, Resources Division, DOH
'In Attendance'	Ms Aoife Gillivan, Alternate Chair for Communications Unit, DOH Mr. Ronan O'Kelly, Statistician R&D & Health Analytics Division, DOH Ms. Sheona Gilsean, Senior Health Data Analyst R&D & Health Analytics Division, DOH Dr. Heather Burns, Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine, HSE Ms Marita Kinsella, Director, NPSO, DOH Ms. Siobhain Brophy, NPHEP Policy Development Team, DOH Ms Laura Casey, Policy and Strategy Division, DOH Ms Sarah Treleaven, CMO Division, DOH Dr Matthew Robinson, Specialist Registrar in Public Health, DOH Mr Gerry O' Brien, Acting Director, Health Protection Division Dr Elaine Breslin, Clinical Assessment Manager, HPRA (alternate for Jeanette McCallion) Dr Trish Markham, HSE (alternate for Tom McGuinness) Ms Deirdre McNamara, HSE (alternate for Colm Henry) Ms Deirdre Watters, Communications Unit, DOH Ms Emily de Grae, Policy and Strategy Division, DOH Ms Ruth Barrett, Policy and Strategy Division, DOH Mr Aaron Rafter, Policy and Strategy Division, DOH
Secretariat	Dr Keith Lyons, Ms Sorcha Ní Dhúill, Mr. Liam Robinson, Ms Ruth Brandon, DOH
Apologies	Mr David Keating, Communicable Diseases Policy Unit, DOH Ms Tracey Conroy, Assistant Secretary, Acute Hospitals Policy Division, DOH Dr Darina O'Flanagan, Special Advisor to the NPHEP Dr Alan Smith, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, DOH Mr Tom McGuinness, Assistant National Director for Emergency Management, HSE Mr Liam Woods, National Director, Acute Operations, HSE



1. Welcome and Introductions

a) *Conflict of Interest*

Verbal pause and none declared.

b) *Matters Arising*

There were no matters arising at the meeting.

2. Epidemiological Assessment

a) *Evaluation of Epidemiological data: (incorporating National Data Update, Modelling Report and International Update)*

The DOH, the HPSC, and the IEMAG provided an overview of the latest epidemiological data regarding confirmed cases, including the current information on hospitalisation, critical care, mortality, sampling, testing, and contact tracing. The data presented were as follows:

Cases and Deaths

- The number of confirmed cases stands at 27,257;
- The 5-day rolling average of cases was 96 cases;
- The 14-day epidemiological incidence per 100,000 population was 23.3;
- 8,495 cases (31% of all cases) were associated with healthcare workers;
- 1,774 deaths due to COVID-19 notified to date;
- The positivity rate for all tests processed nationally in the past week was 1.2%;
- Over the past eight weeks, the total number of cases weekly has increased from a low of 61 cases per week to 533 cases in the week ending 15th August.

Demographic and Location Trends

- 71% of cases notified in the past 14 days have occurred in people under age 45 years, with some evidence of an increase in disease incidence in those over 65 years;
- The median age for cases notified in the past 14 days is 31 years;
- Kildare continues to have the highest 14-day incidence rate (190.1) with Offaly (133.4) and Laois (55.5) next;
- 11 counties have incidence rates higher than 15 cases per 100,000 population.

Hospitalisations

- There were 21 confirmed cases in hospital on 16th August 2020 with 4 admissions in the previous 24 hours;
- The number of confirmed COVID-19 patients requiring critical care on 16th August 2020 was 8, with no new admissions in the previous 24 hours.

Clusters and Modes of Transmission

- The number of clusters is increasing and spreading in geography beyond Kildare, Laois and Offaly;
- More clusters related to social and family engagements, sporting activities and workplaces are being identified;
- 161 new outbreaks in total were notified in the previous week (9th-15th August). The total number of outbreaks notified to date was 2,497 with 290 of these remaining open;
- The majority of open outbreaks are located in private households (172 of the 290 open);



- As of the previous week (3rd-9th August), the average number of close contacts per case was 5 and the median was 3;
- The total number of household, social, sporting and workplace contacts identified via contact tracing have been increasing over the past two weeks.

Mode of Transmission

- “Close contact with a confirmed case” is now the most frequently cited mode of transmission for cases that have occurred in the past 14 days (62% of cases);
- The proportion of cases that are noted as being attributable to community transmission may be increasing; this is being monitored closely; 16% were still under investigation.

The NPHET noted with concern the current profile of the disease and the evolving situation across the country, in particular:

- the increasing case numbers of this disease currently being reported each day, and the increasing incidence observed nationally;
- the primary mode of transmission of the virus is close contact with a confirmed case (including those cases associated with outbreaks);
- the changing profile of contacts identified, with more household, workplace, and social contacts being identified, including those associated with sporting activities;
- multiple significant outbreaks associated with workplaces, households, social and sporting activities;
- as of 12th August, the latest estimate of R is 1.6, this number is updated weekly;
- Ireland’s rate of growth in new cases over the past 14 days is the 4th highest among European member states.

The NPHET further noted that it may be beneficial to provide data on the medically vulnerable as a distinct epidemiological group (i.e. separately from those over 70 years) at future meetings, the feasibility of which will be explored.

3. Review of Existing Policy

a) Paper on Advising Government in relation to Public Health Restrictive Measures

The DOH presented its “*Paper on Advising Government in relation to Public Health Restrictive Measures*”, which set out a range of measures in light of the evolving epidemiological situation nationally, drawn from the suite of possible public health measures set out in the Orange Phase response of the Framework, agreed by the NPHET on the 23rd July 2020.

The NPHET was invited to focus its discussion on 2 main areas:

- Review the situation in Kildare, Laois and Offaly, while noting that any further decision on the measures applying to the three counties will be taken later in the week;
- Consider the situation across the country and the requirement for any additional public health measures.

In considering the paper and developing its public health advice to Government, the NPHET had regard to the following:

- The epidemiological situation nationally with regard to a number of the indicators that it monitors on a collective basis, including: (1) the existence of many clusters in a number of regions and setting types, with secondary spread particularly to household and social contacts; (2) the 14-day



cumulative incidence and related indicators, which are showing a significant and increasing level of disease; (3) the (albeit small) increase in admissions to hospital and critical care; and (4) that the level of community transmission may be increasing.

- The NPHET also noted that indicators in relation to the incidence of cases in residential healthcare settings and number of deaths are not currently showing any worrying trends; however, due to the age profile of current cases, there may be a delay before changes to these indicators would become apparent;
- The experience internationally, including in some countries, which have seen significant increases in cases of COVID-19 infection, including outbreaks in some settings and regions following the easing of public health measures, resulting in the requirement to reimpose public health restrictive measures in those countries and / or regions of those countries;
- Ongoing evidence and information regarding the experiences of members of the public, adherence to the public health personal behaviours and social distancing measures in place through regular quantitative and qualitative public opinion research and focus groups, analysis of non-health information sources such as transportation, mobility, and congregation data;
- That there are other important considerations for Government with regard to the reintroduction of measures, such as social and economic considerations, while noting the potential effects of the current proposed measures on the wider health and wellbeing of the population.

The NPHET, taking note of the epidemiological situation emerging since the last week in July 2020 and in particular in recent days, the deteriorating pandemic situation globally, most recent ECDC advice, and the key priorities of protecting the most vulnerable, resuming non-COVID health and social care services and reopening the education sector, agreed that the Government should be advised to give consideration to implementing the following measures across the country¹ until midnight 13th September, at which point the situation will be further reviewed:

Indoor and Outdoor Gatherings:

- All visits to homes will be limited to 6 people from no more than 3 households (including indoors and outdoors);
- Other gatherings/events indoors will be limited to 6 people from no more than 3 households²;
- Other gatherings/events outdoors will be limited to 15 people (see footnote 2);
- Gardaí should be given any powers necessary to interrupt and prevent house parties;
- Gardaí should be given any powers necessary to interrupt other social gatherings that do not adhere to the above guidance.

Cultural and Social Activities:

Restaurants and cafés (including pubs that serve food and hotel restaurants)

- Remain open but with legally binding conditions introduced in Regulations³, including:
 - Early closing time as already advised by the NPHET on 4th August;
 - Wearing of face coverings by staff to be made mandatory for customer-facing roles, as advised by the NPHET on 4th August. In addition, customers should be required to wear a face covering on arrival (until shown to the table) and again on departure;

¹ Measures agreed by Government for Kildare, Laois, and Offaly to remain in place until the 23rd August or pending a further Government decision.

² For weddings it is proposed that measures only commence on Monday 24th August.

³ The first four measures to apply on an ongoing basis.



- Requirement to keep contact details to support contact tracing;
- All customers to be seated at a table, with no seating allowed at the bar and table service only;
- Maximum of 6 seated at a table from no more than 3 households;
- No formal or informal events or parties greater than 6 indoors and 15 outdoors should be organised in these settings (see footnote 2);
- Guidelines should emphasise the importance of appropriate ventilation, the provision of hand sanitiser on each table, and the importance of restricting unnecessary movement around the premises by customers;
- These measures are aimed at preventing transmission between parties, or to- or between staff. There is an obligation on proprietors, managers, staff, and patrons to take all reasonable precautions to prevent contact and cross-contamination between different groups;
- Greater inspection and enforcement arrangements to be put in place as soon as possible to ensure that premises are operating safely and within Regulations and guidelines.

Sports

- Sporting events and matches can continue to take place but behind closed doors⁴ with:
 - Strict avoidance of gatherings, including social gatherings, before or after events;
 - Strict adherence to 2-metre physical distancing before and after events, during breaks in play, on the side-lines, and avoidance of team huddles;
- Gyms/leisure centres/swimming pools/exercise and dance studios will remain open with strict distancing and other appropriate protective measures in place;
- Limits of 6 apply to exercise and dance classes with appropriate physical distancing. Limits of 15 apply to groups outside, including training sessions. There should be no mixing between groups.⁵

Services to Remain Open:

- It is advised that the following services should remain open with appropriate protective measures in place:
 - Education and childcare;
 - Outdoor playgrounds, play areas, parks, and sports amenities;
 - All retail and personal services to remain open, with strict distancing and other appropriate protective measures in place;
 - Museums, theatres, and galleries etc. to remain open, with strict distancing and other appropriate protective measures in place and with no ancillary events involving gatherings of more than 6 people indoors or 15 people outdoors;
 - Hotels.

Workplaces:

- Unless it is absolutely essential for an employee to attend in person, they should not do so, and they should be facilitated to work from home;
- Greater inspection and enforcement arrangements to be put in place immediately to ensure that premises are operating safely and within Regulations and guidelines;
- The NPHET recommendations of 4th of August and 6th August in relation high-risk workplaces should be implemented with urgency.

⁴ Given the importance of sporting activities to communities, videographers/those providing streaming services may attend.

⁵ These measures do not apply to elite and professional sports and horse racing.



Travel/Transport:

- No limits on movement outside of restrictions currently in place;
- People should avoid using public transport where possible;
- People should not share private vehicles with others from outside their household. Where this is not possible, the wearing of face coverings is advised and should be made mandatory;
- For secondary school students on school transport, strict distancing should be ensured in line with that on public transport, along with the wearing of face coverings. Primary school students should distance, where possible;
- Transport companies should ensure that hand sanitiser is provided at transport hubs.

The NPHE also recalled and reiterated its previous recommendations of 30th July, and 4th and 6th August concerning COVID-19 testing and contact tracing, and specific measures targeted at vulnerable groups.

In providing the above outlined public health advice to Government the NPHE –

- Noted that it considers the suite of measures being proposed as targeted, reasonable and proportionate at this stage, offering the potential to be effective in addressing those areas that are of most concern currently. The focus of these measures is threefold:
 - limit congregation and inter-household interactions;
 - enhance the application, inspection and enforcement of current measures; and
 - roll-out further targeted protection measures.
- Having due regard to the ECDC and the WHO advice and experiences internationally, cautioned that while the proposed measures have the potential to arrest the current trajectory of the disease, there is also the potential that the situation could deteriorate further with significant negative implications for the key priorities of protecting the most vulnerable, resuming non-COVID health and social care services, and reopening the education sector, and that it is not possible to provide assurance that stricter measures will not be required;
- Emphasised the importance of now redoubling efforts across Government and society to continue to adopt and enhance compliance with hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, physical distancing, the wearing of face coverings, and all public health measures to the greatest extent possible to protect each other, to minimise the risk of a resurgence of infection in Ireland, and to avoid the necessity to reintroduce stricter measures.
- Expressed its concern regarding the continuing trend of increase in the number of cases in younger people and particularly those aged under 45 in recent weeks. While it is recognised that people will want to socialise and engage with friends again after the extended period of restrictive measures, it is important that people of all ages do so safely through maintaining good hygiene practices and physical distancing as well as limiting the number of people that we meet with, all to protect each other from infection spread;
- Committed to a clear, consistent, and accessible risk communication strategy with the public and other key groups, to continually re-emphasise collective behaviours and solidarity in limiting the spread of infection for the foreseeable future and support the desired behavioural change through ongoing communication and education initiatives, and reiterated its advice of 4th August 2020 that there is an intensification and refreshing of cross-Government communications in relation to COVID-19, with specific emphasis on communicating and engaging with those under the age of 45;
- While recognising that individuals must take responsibility for their own behaviour, emphasised that there is also a firm responsibility on employers and organisations to ensure that workplaces, venues, events, and other activities adhere to public health advice and guidelines, and on relevant



authorities and regulatory bodies to ensure that the measures advised and agreed are then subsequently applied, monitored, and enforced;

- Expressed, in particular, increasing concern that some premises purporting to operate as restaurants are not always doing so, which is having a significant detrimental effect on the solidarity and sense of fairness that has underpinned the national effort to date, and with this in mind reiterates the need for more urgent and stronger measures addressing these circumstances, including the closure of premises that are clearly disregarding the clear guidance as it should apply to their sector;
- Expressed further concern in relation to a number of clusters that have emerged linked to sporting activities, and called on all relevant organisations to ensure that current guidelines are strictly adhered to, and in particular in relation to physical distancing before and after events, during breaks in play, and avoidance of team huddles.
- Expressed again its concerns in relation to the vulnerability of high-risk populations and high-risk workplaces and reiterated the urgency, with which its recommendations of 4th and 6th August should be implemented;
- In light of the deteriorating pandemic situation globally, reiterated its previous public health advice regarding travel, noting that the travel-related introduction of the disease continues to be a significant concern in terms of increasing the risk of a potential second-wave of the disease in Ireland. Consequently, it is important that, at this time, people in Ireland are encouraged to continue to follow public health advice against non-essential travel outside of Ireland and that all measures are utilised to discourage travel from overseas to Ireland;
- Emphasised the continued importance of ongoing monitoring and review of epidemiological trends and the health system impact of COVID-19 such that any changes in the overall situation will be detected rapidly, in order that future advice to Government, and health service measures and responses can be implemented based on the transmission patterns of the disease, the trajectory and velocity of change, and the evolving analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the population and health system capacity;
- Reiterated its recommendations to the HSE of the 30th July in relation to the criticality of robust processes of sampling, testing, contact tracing, surveillance and reporting, and noted that notwithstanding the significant efforts already made, the urgent need for a continued process of enhancements and the introduction of any necessary measures and resources to support Departments of Public Health and testing and contact tracing operations to respond comprehensively to cases and clusters over the coming weeks and to enable the comprehensive completion of all relevant surveillance data and the timely notification of cases so as to ensure continued accurate understanding of the current epidemiological position. In tandem, there should be continued proactive engagement between the Department of Health and the HSE in relation to the implementation of a sustainable plan for the future of public health.

Action: In light of the current epidemiological picture across the country, recent significant outbreaks and in line with the “Framework for Future COVID-19 Pandemic Response”, the NPHE recommends that additional public health restrictive measures, as set out within its advice to Government 17th August be implemented with immediate effect until the 13th of September, pending further review.

4. Meeting Close

a) Agreed actions

The key actions arising from the meeting were examined by the NPHE, clarified, and agreed.



b) AOB

A question of whether the currently available epidemiological data for Kildare, Laois and Offaly warranted consideration of implementing further public health restrictive measures was raised. The NPHEAT agreed that the data currently available did not warrant further public health restrictive measures at this time, and that enhanced epidemiological data will be available for the meeting of 20th August where the matter will be considered in detail.

c) Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the NPHEAT will take place Thursday 20th August 2020, at 10:00am via video conferencing.