



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

8<sup>th</sup> October 2020

**Via email to Private Secretary to the Minister for Health**

Dear Minister,

I write further to today's meeting of the COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET). The NPHET continues to express deep concern in relation to the epidemiological situation across the country, which has further deteriorated since it last met on the 4<sup>th</sup> October. The NPHET noted the sustained increases across key indicators since that meeting including:

- A total of 3,436 cases have been notified in the past seven days, compared with 3,072 in the seven days to the 4<sup>th</sup> October.
- The 7- and 14-day incidences are 72 and 124 per 100,000 population, respectively; these compare with 7- and 14- day incidences of 66 and 108 per 100,000, respectively
- The 5-day average of reported cases is 508; this compares with a 5-day average of cases of 462 on 4<sup>th</sup> October.
- A total of 90,332 tests were undertaken in the last seven days. The 7-day average test positivity rate has increased from 3.4% on 3<sup>rd</sup> October to 4% as of 7<sup>th</sup> October. The positivity rate yesterday, 7<sup>th</sup> October, was 5.2%.
- The 14-day incidence in those aged 65 years and older has increased from 67.3 per 100,000 population on 3<sup>rd</sup> October to 92.9 per 100,000 population on the 7<sup>th</sup> October.
- There are currently 159 confirmed cases in hospital, compared with 134 on 4<sup>th</sup> October.
- There are currently 27 confirmed cases in critical care, compared with 22 on 4<sup>th</sup> October.

Further relevant information includes;

- To date, there have been eight deaths notified with a date of death in October. This compares with 5 and 34 deaths notified (to date) with a date of death in August and September, respectively.
- In the week to Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October, there were 11 new clusters notified in nursing homes (n=10) / community hospitals (n1), with 86 linked cases.
- In the past fortnight, to 7<sup>th</sup> October, 397 cases have been reported in healthcare workers.
- The estimate of effective reproduction for the country is 1.2;

- The current profile of the disease in Northern Ireland, which has a 7-day incidence of approximately 235 per 100,000 population.
- The deteriorating international epidemiological situation was noted.

The NPHET will continue to monitor the situation very closely. The NPHET also reemphasised the importance of a continuing focus on communications, inspection and enforcement measures, and public service supports as set out in its letter of the 4<sup>th</sup> October.

The NPHET noted with concern the recent trends which demonstrate an increasing number of COVID-19 cases and clusters in residents of nursing homes and staff working in these settings. The NPHET emphasised that reducing overall community transmission is an essential prerequisite to the protection of those living and working in nursing homes against COVID-19. The NPHET further noted that an interagency approach is in place with significant supports, guidance and regulatory oversight being provided to nursing homes by the HSE and HIQA.

The COVID-19 Nursing Home Expert Panel's Report makes 86 comprehensive recommendations, primarily noting that responsibility for the implementation of these recommendations lies with individual nursing homes, the HSE, HIQA, NTPF and the Department of Health, as appropriate. To monitor the implementation of the prioritised operational recommendations, oversight mechanisms for reporting to you as Minister for Health are now in place. Additionally, an information campaign building on current HSE and HIQA education and training supports to target individual nursing homes, with a key focus on infection prevention and control, is being developed. Moreover, the NPHET emphasised the importance of continuing the programme of fortnightly serial testing for staff in nursing homes as a proactive protective measure.

With regard to the programme of testing nationally and the need to take steps to proactively identify positive cases of COVID-19 within higher risk cohorts and settings, the NPHET asked that the HSE finalise its proposals for sustainable approaches to testing across a number of priority areas including vulnerable groups living in congregated settings, healthcare workers in acute settings and food processing facilities.

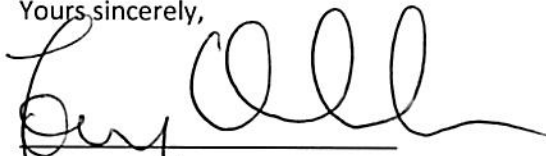
The NPHET considered an evidence review by HIQA and its Expert Advisory Group entitled "Rapid health technology assessment (HTA) of alternatives to laboratory-based real-time RT-PCR to diagnose current infection with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)". While research and developments within this area are progressing, the NPHET identified a number of areas where further work is required prior to the procurement or implementation of a rapid (non-PCR) testing approach.

Finally, NPHET recommended that healthcare students in higher and further education (including allied health disciplines) should be facilitated to attend on site, with appropriate protective measures in place, for any clinical placements, simulation exercises or training, laboratory practice or practical examinations that are necessary to meet professional or regulatory requirements.

The NPHET of course remains available to provide any further advice and recommendations that may be of assistance to you and Government in relation to ongoing decision-making processes in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

## **Appendix 1: Epidemiological Data**

Ireland's current epidemiological situation is as follows:

### Cases and Deaths

- The number of confirmed cases stands at 39,584;
- The 5-day average of cases is currently 508 cases per day; the 5-day average was 462 per day on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> of October and 411 per day on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> of October.
- The current 14-day incidence per 100,000 population is 124.4. The 14-day incidence rate was 114.2 per 100,000 population on the 1<sup>st</sup> October and 92.1 per 100,000 population on 4<sup>th</sup> October.
- The current 7-day incidence is 72.2 cases per 100,000 population. The 7-day incidence rate was 66.8 per 100,000 population on 1<sup>st</sup> October and 57.8 per 100,000 population on 4<sup>th</sup> October.
- 9,434 cases (24% of all cases) were associated with healthcare workers; 397 cases were reported in healthcare workers in the fortnight to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020.
- 1,816 deaths due to COVID-19 notified to date; 8 of these have occurred in the month of October; 34 deaths have occurred in the month of September;
- The 7-day average positivity rate has increased from 3% on 30th September to 4% as of 7th October.
- The current estimate of R is 1.2. It was estimated to be between 1.2 and 1.4 last week.

### Demographic and Location Trends

- 66% of cases notified in the past 14 days have occurred in people under 45 years of age;
- The median age for all cases remains stable; the median age for cases notified in the past 14 days is 33 years;
- Incidence in older age groups is increasing with 10% of cases notified in the last 7 days in the over 65 age group.
- 23 counties have an increasing 14-day incidence rate at present as compared to their rates last week.

### Hospitalisations

- There were 159 confirmed cases in hospital today with 17 admissions in the previous 24 hours. This time last week, there were 122 COVID-19 patients in hospital with 15 new admissions in the preceding 24 hours. On the 1st of September there were 36.
- Over the last week there have been an average of 13 new admissions per day. The number of confirmed COVID-19 patients requiring critical care yesterday was 27, with 3 new admission in the previous 24 hours. Last Wednesday, there were 20 COVID-19 patients in critical care.

### Clusters and Modes of Transmission

- 492 additional new clusters were notified in the past week to 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020. There are 2,083 open clusters nationally; The vast majority of open clusters continue to be associated with private households (1,628 of the 2,083 clusters);
- In the fortnight to 6<sup>th</sup> October, 57% of all cases in recent days have arisen as a result of close contact with a confirmed case. A further 38% of cases are linked with community or possible community transmission.