



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

22nd 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 (NPHE). The NPHE considered the most recent epidemiological data nationally (see Appendix 1) and noted with concern the continuing deterioration in the profile of the disease. It stressed the importance of continued adherence to core public health principles and the imperative for everyone do everything within their individual power and control to support the success of the Level 5 measures in place.

The NPHE also noted the continuing deterioration in the situation across Europe and the trend towards the imposition of more restrictive public health measures throughout the region. The NPHE will continue to monitor the profile of the disease closely in the coming weeks.

The NPHE also considered the current programme of serial testing in nursing homes and recommended the programme maintain the current two-week testing cycle interval for a further two cycles. Furthermore, the NPHE recommended that the HSE undertake an exploration of how to further improve the uptake of serial testing among nursing home staff over the coming weeks. In addition, the NPHE considered and endorsed a paper setting out the areas of greatest priority for health protection teams, identifying the areas where these teams may have the greatest impact, allowing for an improved overall response to the growing demand.

The NPHE also agreed that, based on the available evidence, visors are not recommended for use in most settings, while recognising they may be a useable alternative to cloth face coverings in some limited defined circumstances, including for those with breathing difficulties, those with additional needs, and when communicating with a person who is hard of hearing or deaf. It intends ensure this message is clearly communicated.

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

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

Appendix 1: Epidemiological Data

Ireland's current epidemiological situation is as follows:

Cases and Deaths

- The number of confirmed cases stands at 53,422; There have been 8,231 cases notified in the past seven days up, compared with 5,683 in the previous seven days, a 46% increase.
- Case numbers have been growing exponentially with a daily growth rate of 5-8% per day.
- The 5-day average of cases is currently 1,205 cases per day; the 5-day average was 946 per day on 15th October.
- The current 14-day incidence per 100,000 population is 303. The 14-day incidence rate was 207 per 100,000 population on the 15th October and 92 per 100,000 population on 1st October.
- The current 7-day incidence is 173 cases per 100,000 population. The 7-day incidence rate was 119 per 100,000 population on 15th October and 52 per 100,000 population on 1st October.
- 511 cases have been reported in healthcare workers in the fortnight to 20th October 2020. This represents 3.7% of all cases over the period.
- 1,868 deaths due to COVID-19 notified to date; 57 of these have occurred in the month of October; 35 deaths have occurred in the month of September;
- Of the 57 COVID deaths in October to date, 23 have been in residents of Nursing homes.
- The 7-day average positivity rate has increased from 4% on 8th of October to 7% as of 21st October. A total of 112,016 tests were undertaken in the last seven days
- The current estimate of R is 1.3 – 1.4.
- The current 7-day incidence in Northern Ireland is 361 per 100,000 population as 20th October.

Demographic and Location Trends

- 69% of cases notified in the past 14 days have occurred in people under 45 years of age; the median age for cases notified in the past 14 days is 31 years;
- Incidence in older age groups is increasing with 8% of cases notified in the last 7 days in the 65 years and over age group. The 14-day incidence in those aged 65 years and older has increased from 131.0 per 100,000 population on 15th October to 190.3 per 100,000 population on the 22nd October.

Hospitalisations

- There were 305 confirmed cases in hospital today with 21 admissions in the previous 24 hours. This time last week, there were 238 COVID-19 patients in hospital with 17 new admissions in the preceding 24 hours. On the 1st of October there were 122 patients in hospital.
- Over the last week there have been an average of 19 new admissions per day. The number of confirmed COVID-19 patients requiring critical care yesterday was 35, with 3 new admission in the previous 24 hours. Last Wednesday, there were 30 COVID-19 patients in critical care.

Clusters and Modes of Transmission

- 647 additional new clusters were notified in the past week to 3rd October 2020. There are 2,999 open clusters nationally. Of these, 37 open outbreaks are associated with nursing homes and 27 open outbreaks are associated with hospitals.
- There is widespread community transmission of the disease with extensive evidence of widespread secondary/tertiary spread.