

Update from Subgroup on Behavioural Change for NPHE meeting 12/05/2020

- The Subgroup is meeting weekly and last met on Thursday 7th May.
- The Subgroup continues to analyse the findings from the communications research and other surveys and research, to provide advice to the **communications strategy**.
- The **DBEI survey of business capability** to implement public health measures, which the subgroup has supported development of, is live this week until 15th May.
- The Behavioural Research Unit (BRU) of the ESRI is conducting a study to support the ongoing development of the **COVID Tracker App**.
- The BRU also presented further findings from the study to explore **expectations and attitudes around lifting of restrictions**. The study findings suggest that the public expect restrictions to continue for a substantial period of time into the future, while men in general were more optimistic 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.
- The Subgroup discussed potential behavioural issues around the concept of '**micro-communities**'. The significant positive impact to people's wellbeing from being able to safely enjoy the physical company of important others outside their household was recognised; however it was generally felt 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 it would be quite complicated to develop and communicate a 'ruleset' around a 'bubble' given the diversity of households and variable to be considered. The group's initial advice is that going back to the basics of the rationale, ie encouraging people to limit social interactions and mixing, and giving simple, high-level advice on that as we move through phases, as well as being explicit about the trade-offs involved, might be more effective.

- The group also discussed potential behavioural issue around guidance on **face coverings/masks**, and noted recent evidence and recommendations on this, including that published by the UK SAGE. The importance of effective communications of guidance around appropriate and correct use, cleaning/disposal was highlighted. The group noted the importance of how new guidance on masks is communicated in the context of the broader 'toolkit' of behaviours and the overall evidence.

As 'non-compliance' with guidance/recommendations will be very obvious and visible, and particularly if the message is that 'you wear one to protect others', there would be significant psychological cost of non-compliance which could potentially lead to stigma, and affect social cohesion. Issues around affordability/accessibility would also be important if these were factors in non-compliance. If guidance for wearing was around particular environments, eg public transport, it would be important to consider how that environment could enable compliance.

The issue of potential risk compensation was discussed, and the group noted there doesn't appear to be evidence that it would affect compliance with other measures, and might have effect of being a visible reminder of Covid and need for continued vigilance.

- The group also discussed potential for **behavioural fatigue** and potential future waves of the virus, noting that while people may respond negatively to any 'stepping back' on measures, as losses are felt more keenly than gains, there may also be a benefit of their experience in knowing how to comply with public health advice so far that could support a rapid response.