

Update from Subgroup on Behavioural Change for NPHE meeting 16/07/2020

- The Subgroup has met on Friday 10th July 2020 and 24th June 2020 since the last update to NPHE.
- The main focus of the work in recent weeks has been on **two behavioural studies** designed by the Subgroup and conducted by the Behavioural Research Unit in the ESRI. These studies focussed on (i) risk perception and (ii) symptom recognition and self-isolation.
- The main findings from the study on **risk perception** showed that while the public have a good understanding of Covid risks, they underestimate the higher risks associated with being indoors, and also underestimate the additive effects of several risk factors, as well as underestimating the benefits of everyone wearing masks. These findings, and insights from the Subgroup's discussion, will feed into the ongoing communications and planning for future policy responses.
- The main findings from the behavioural study on **symptom recognition and self-isolation** decision-making, raised a number of issues of concerns which are being fed into ongoing communications around these issues and planning for future policy responses. The study found that approx. 50% of people experiencing one of the main Covid symptoms would self-isolate/call a GP promptly, and even with severe or two Covid symptoms, 1 in 4 reported being unlikely to immediately call their GP. Men, less educated, younger and non-Irish people were the least likely to call their GP with a main Covid symptoms. Recognition of the need to act on 'cold and flu' symptoms was generally low. A large minority also were unaware that the GP assessment and Covid test were free. The study also appeared to show that people naturally thought of other possible causes of their symptoms if they felt they hadn't been involved in any 'high-risk' situation. These findings highlight a number of issues that warrant further education and communication with the public, including the importance of addressing stigma and not attaching blame to people who may become infected.
- The Subgroup has also reviewed and provided advice in relation to the Department's **research on face coverings** to improve data collection and interpretation on this issue, and also provided advice in relation to the public communications strategy on this issue.
- The Subgroup is currently finalising a paper for NPHE on an **overview** of the process and work programme to date, with a view to informing the next steps as part of the overall review of NPHE structures and processes.