
COVID-19 NPHET Subgroup - Vulnerable People

NPHET Meeting 22/05/2020

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1. NPHEM COVID-19 Subgroup – Vulnerable People

The NPHEM Subgroup on Vulnerable People was established to provide oversight and assurance with regard to the specific preparedness, measures and actions that need to be taken to protect vulnerable groups and individuals in society.

The term vulnerable people is being used to include older people, people with a disability, mental health service users, those with an underlying illness or condition, children in care and those accessing social inclusion services (not an exhaustive list). Services to vulnerable people are provided through a range of settings and are under the remit of a number of Government Departments. These settings include long and short-term care, primary care, respite, day services, prisons and youth detention centres, direct provision and care in individual homes (not an exhaustive list).

The role of the NPHEM Subgroup on Vulnerable People is to ensure that a framework is in place to provide assurance that all relevant Departments and State Agencies have preparedness plans in place to ensure that the people and services they are responsible for, are cared for and protected, as part of the whole of Government response to COVID-19.

2. Meeting 20 May 2020

A meeting of the subgroup took place on Wednesday 20th May. To note all subgroup minutes, once agreed by the subgroup, are available on the website at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/301f5e-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-npmet-subgroup-vulnerable/>. There have been 9 meetings of the subgroup to date, the first meeting taking place on 6th March 2020.

3. Updates from Departments

The Chair acknowledged feedback from a number of Departments/Agencies regarding the publication of High Level Actions online. It was agreed that each Department/Agency would arrange for publication and updating of such actions on their individual websites. The Department will provide links to other Departments/Agencies on its website, by way of further information for the public.

4. Guidance on visiting in LTRC settings

A draft paper *Draft Guidance on Visitations to Residential Care Facilities* was circulated to the group in advance of the meeting and joining the group for this discussion were Dr Kevin Kelleher (AND for Public & Child Health HSE) and Dr. Siobhan Kennelly (NCAGL for Older Persons, HSE).

The purpose of this draft paper is to set out guidelines for families and friends for visiting residents in long term care residential (LTRC) settings. As such it must balance the ethical considerations and the requirement from a public health perspective to protect residents from infection in a way that does not infringe upon their rights to an extent, or in a manner, that is disproportionate

The paper was broadly welcomed, and the timeliness of this paper being developed in line with phases of the Roadmap to re-opening Society and Business was noted. The group also discussed some of the challenges which may arise locally in terms of implementation of such guidance.

After the meeting further feedback was received in writing by some subgroup members and this has been provided back to the HSE for consideration. It was noted that this paper will now go to NPHE for discussion.

5. Update on cocooning guidance

As part of the roadmap to reopening society and business, and in line with public health guidance, from May 18, the guidance in relation to people who are 70 and over or are medically vulnerable to Covid-19 has changed. From this time, when people who are cocooning go out for exercise, they can meet people in groups of up to 4 outdoors, but it is essential that they practice social distancing by staying 2m (6 feet) apart and avoiding all physical contact.

The subgroup discussed some recent queries that have been raised from various stakeholders in terms of how we can support some cohorts of vulnerable people to social distance and to inform society of some of the challenges for such cohorts. The Comms Team agreed to look at these issues raised further with a view to supporting information sharing in this regard.

6. Resumption of services in the community

The subgroup was updated on the establishment of the Community Capacity Working Group and work to set out the current level of service delivery in the community and set out plans, including associated required capacity, to resume services as appropriate in the community. The work will cover both Covid-19 related and non-Covid-19 related services and will take on board both the challenges and opportunity emanating from the structures, practices and changes in practice that have been introduced as part of the response to Covid-19. It covers primary care, social care, mental health and social inclusion services.

The important role of the Community Support Framework and the evaluation of this work was highlighted by the group.

7. Communications

Work is ongoing on the communication plan with a coordinated approach between the Department and HSE Communications Team. Key milestones since the last meeting include:

- Updated material cocooning.
- Using social media channels to remind of Covid-19 symptoms, step by step face covering video.
- HSE healthcare workers campaign - minding yourself.

It was noted that a further stakeholder update will issue by email this week