
COVID-19 NPHEP Subgroup - Vulnerable People

NPHEP Meeting 04/06/2020

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1. NPHET COVID-19 Subgroup – Vulnerable People

The NPHET 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 NPHET 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 3rd June 2020

A meeting of the subgroup took place on Wednesday 3rd June. 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-nphet-subgroup-vulnerable/> . There have been 10 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 has provided links to other Departments/Agencies on its website at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/301f5e-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-nphet-subgroup-vulnerable-/#further-information-resources>

4. Roadmap for the re-opening of Society and Business

In line with the Roadmap for the re-opening of Society and Business, and subject to public health recommendations from the NPHE and a Government decision, considerations for moving to PHASE 2 were discussed. It is envisaged that that moving to the next phase of the Roadmap will include important changes for many people, including vulnerable people, in how they are able to go about their daily life.

The terms of reference of the NPHE subgroup on Vulnerable people takes a whole of government approach and focuses on the policy responsibilities of the various Departments and Agencies and their work on ensuring preparedness plans and contingencies are in place to mitigate the impact of cases, mitigation measures and spread of COVID-19. Government departments, state agencies and other stakeholders have a responsibility to advance their considerations to ensure planning and effective communications are in place in moving to PHASE 2 for the vulnerable groups and service users under their remit.

As part of this work the meeting on the 3rd June focused on:

- I. Potential changes to the cocooning guidance based on the roadmap
- II. Discussion on the D/Taoiseach paper social implications of COVID-19
- III. Updates from subgroup members on their ongoing policy work in relation to PHASE 2 of the Roadmap and any changes for groups or services under their remit.

The role of communications in relation to changes to for those people who are cocooning was highlighted. It was noted that the Department of Health is working with colleagues in the HSE and HPSC to ensure that relevant guidance is updated as required, and effective communications strategy is put in place, caveated by public health recommendations from NPHE and Government decisions. Notwithstanding any changes to the guidance, it is noted that those who are cocooning should try to stay at home as much as possible and ensure they minimize risk as much as possible when they are making decisions around any visits, visiting or shopping.

The Department of Health updated the group on the work of the Community Capacity Working Group to develop plans for the resumption of health services in the community including to older persons, people living with disabilities and those accessing mental health or social inclusion services. A number of subgroup members outlined plans for resumption of services under their Department/ State Agency remit and a number of issues were raised including safeguarding, the associated costs of alternative ways of providing services and the contribution of informal care.

5. Communications

Work is ongoing on the communication plan with a coordinated approach between the Department of Health and HSE Communications Team. This includes;

- Number of recent radio adverts for those who are cocooning, those whose sleep patterns are being disturbed, and a public awareness campaign with National Council for the Blind (NCBI) on people with sight loss and social distancing for other members of the public.
- HSE campaign with spunout.ie using social media platforms aimed at young people addressing social distancing.
- Poster for the Roma community in accessing public services
- Further mental health and mental well-being resources

Subject to NPHET and Government approval of moving to PHASE 2, the Department is developing public health communications resources across a number of strands (e.g. work, home, public places). An FAQ is also in development to have ready for the announcement of any new measures as agreed by Government as part of the Roadmap for the re-opening Society and Business.