



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

12th November 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 (NPHEt).

The NPHEt reviewed the latest epidemiological data and the following key points were noted:

- A total of 2,819 cases have been notified in the seven days to the 11th November, compared with 4,139 in the previous seven days, representing a 32% decrease;
- The 7- and 14-day incidence rates are 60 and 145 per 100,000 population respectively; these compare with last week's 7- and 14- day incidence rates of 86 and 213 per 100,000 population respectively;
- Nationally, the 7-day incidence as a proportion of 14-day incidence is at 41%, demonstrating that there have been less cases in the last 7 days compared to the preceding 7 days;
- The 5-day average of reported cases is 352 cases per day; this compares with a 5-day average of 490 cases per day on the 4th November;
- 64% 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 36 years;
- The proportion of cases notified in the over 65 age group is increasing. In the last seven days 13.5% of cases notified were aged over 65 age group, this compares with 11.9% of cases notified in the previous seven days;
- Of concern, the 7-day incidence per 100,000 population increased for those aged 85 and older from 45.9 in week ending 31st October to 50.3 in week ending 7th November;
- The growth rate of the disease is currently negative. Incidence is now decreasing nationally at -5% to -7% per day. Incidence in Dublin is now decreasing at a similar rate to the rest of the country;
- Of concern, incidence rates in county Donegal remain very high relative to the rest of the country. The 14-day Incidence in Donegal is 301 per 100,000 population which is more than double the current national 14-day incidence rate of 145 per 100,000 population;

- Based on data to the 10th November, the best estimate of reproduction number (R) for the country is approximately 0.6;
- A total of 76,506 tests were undertaken in the last seven days. The 7-day average test positivity rate has decreased from 4.6% to 3.6 % over the last seven days. The positivity rate yesterday, 11th November, was 3.9%;
- There are currently 287 confirmed COVID-19 cases in hospital, compared with 307 on 5th November. There have been 26 newly confirmed cases in hospital in the preceding 24 hours;
- There are currently 39 confirmed cases in critical care, compared with 38 on 5th November. There have been 3 new admissions in the previous 24 hours;
- To date, there have been 32 deaths notified with a date of death in November. This compares with 36 and 119 deaths notified (to date) with a date of death in September and October, respectively. Of the 32 deaths that have occurred in November, 10 are associated with nursing homes;

Further relevant information includes:

- 572 additional new clusters were notified in the past week to 7th November 2020. There are 4,202 open clusters nationally. Of these, 49 open clusters are associated with nursing homes and 37 open clusters are associated with hospitals.
- In the week to midnight 7th November 2020 (week 45), there were 3 new clusters notified in nursing homes/community hospitals with 165 linked cases notified and 11 new clusters in hospitals with 111 linked cases notified.
- A range of mobility data suggest that current measures have resulted in reduced mobility in the population in recent weeks following the introduction of level 5 measures.
- The average number of close contacts has decreased from approximately 5-6 per confirmed case at the end of September to the current level of 2-3 which has remained stable since the start of the introduction of Level 5 measures.
- The current 7-day incidence in Northern Ireland is 207 cases per 100,000 population.

In summary, we continue to observe an overall improvement in the national disease profile across a number of indicators including 7- and 14-day incidence, the 5-day moving average and the estimated R number. Hospitalisations and critical care admissions have been stable and we continue to see substantial mortality related to COVID-19. There has been a very significant decrease in incidence in younger adults, but a persistently high incidence in older adults. Of additional concern recently has been the notification of outbreaks in a number of hospitals and the epidemiological situation in Donegal which the NPHET will continue to keep under close review.

The NPHET noted the sharp contrast between the trajectory of the disease in Ireland and the situation internationally. The elevated risk of importation through travel from countries with high rates of transmission to countries with sustained low rates of transmission can be expected to escalate in the coming period, as our domestic situation further improves while the epidemiological situation internationally and particularly in Europe continues to be a cause for a high level of concern.

The NPHET has noted the importance of protecting the progress the country has achieved through application of Level 5 restrictions and of avoiding a reseeded of cases through international travel.

The NPHET emphasises the need to manage effectively the risk of importation, particularly in the context of non-essential travel from areas of elevated incidence in the coming weeks and during the Christmas/New Year period. It noted the recent Government decision to implement a regime which allows a negative pre-departure PCR test to be a means by which people will not be advised to self-restrict their movements on arrival in Ireland. In this context NPHET noted that Ireland's approach to international arrivals remains solely advisory and not subject to any legal enforcement mechanisms (other than those attaching to completion of the Passenger Locator Form). The issue of international travel will continue to be monitored by NPHET in the coming weeks.

The NPHET gave consideration to the management of COVID-19 within nursing homes and Long-term Residential Care (LTRC) facilities, endorsing a paper which set out recommendations for the continuation of the serial testing programme for this sector. It is further proposed that the scope of the serial testing programme be expanded to include LTRCs for people with mental health concerns, and for people with disabilities, in a phased manner, and in consultation with relevant stakeholders. The NPHET also supported, in principle, a proposal to broaden the compassionate grounds for visitation to LTRC facilities, and recommends that the relevant HSE guidance be updated in consultation with relevant stakeholders to reflect this, with specific consideration given to those who are transferred to acute hospitals from an LTRC facility.

Finally, as indicated in my two previous letters, the NPHET continues to examine a number of key considerations that, pending close review of the epidemiological situation, will support the potential easing of restrictions in the coming weeks. Further consideration was given to the future response strategy for the period following the current wave of infection, the enhancement of, and investment in, our public health response, and the issue of international travel. Work will continue in each of these areas, with a view to providing advice to Government in the coming weeks.

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