



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

4<sup>th</sup> October 2020

**Via email to Private Secretary to the Minister for Health**

Dear Minister,

The COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) met today to consider the significant and concerning deterioration in the epidemiological situation nationally and in particular in recent days.

Over the past number of months NPHE has continually reviewed and updated its recommendations based on the epidemiological status of the disease and weighed against three core priorities; the protection of the most vulnerable, the continued resumption of non-COVID health and social care services and the need to protect the ongoing delivery of education and childcare. The NPHE advises that it is vital that we do everything in our power now to arrest the current trajectory nationally and very substantially suppress the virus back down to a low level of transmission in advance of the winter months. This is critical if we are to continue to protect these core priorities.

The overall national profile of the disease is now the main concern of the NPHE. The measures currently in place are not sufficiently controlling the disease as evidenced by a high volume of community transmission and sustained increases across key indicators, particularly since the NPHE's last meeting, as follows:

- The total number of cases increased by 6% in the week to 28<sup>th</sup> September; the number of cases has increased by approximately 50% in the week to 4<sup>th</sup> October with 3,063 cases notified.
- Over the past week the five-day average of reported cases has increased from 310 cases per day to 462 cases per day.
- The 7- and 14-day incidences have increased from 43 to 66 per 100,000 and from 84 to 108 per 100,000, respectively.
- The 7-day average positivity rate has increased from 2.8% on 27<sup>th</sup> September to 3.4% on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.
- The age profile of reported cases demonstrates that approximately 1 in 4 cases are now in the 15-24-year-old age group, with a 7-day incidence in this group of 119 per 100,000.

- A sustained increase in the 14-day incidence in those aged 65 years and older; this has increased from approximately 6 per 100,000 population in early August to 67.3 per 100,000 on 3<sup>rd</sup> October. There have been 254 cases reported in this age group over the past seven days to the 3<sup>rd</sup> October.
- There are currently 31 open outbreaks in nursing homes. Seven of these have been reported in the past week, with at least 45 confirmed cases in nursing home residents notified in the past week.
- There are currently 25 open outbreaks in vulnerable groups, including 10 in Direct Provision, 7 in congregated settings for the homeless and 7 in the Irish Traveller community, with clusters with secondary and tertiary spread in other settings.
- In the week to the 27<sup>th</sup> September there was an average of 8 admissions per day to hospital. In the week to 3<sup>rd</sup> October there was an average of 12 per day, with 17 new confirmed cases in the last 24 hours and a total of 134 confirmed cases in hospital as of this morning.
- There has been an increase in the average number of admissions to critical care from one per day on 29<sup>th</sup> September to an average of two per day on 4<sup>th</sup> October. Of note, at the peak of admissions, there were 8 admissions to critical care on average per day.
- There are 22 confirmed cases in critical care this morning (4<sup>th</sup> October). 243 out of an available 281 critical care beds are currently occupied.
- The average number of deaths notified per day has increased from 2 on 29<sup>th</sup> September to 3 over the past five days to 4<sup>th</sup> October.
- To date we have been notified of 34 deaths that occurred in September. There were 4 deaths in August.

Disease modelling shows that, if current trends continue, 1,600-2,300 cases will be notified per day by 7<sup>th</sup> November. The modelling also shows 43 people with COVID-19 being admitted to hospital per day by that date.

**In light of the above, the NPHE believes that proactive and robust measures must now be taken such that very significant suppression of the disease with a reproduction number well below 1.0 is achieved. It is therefore recommended that the Government apply Level 5 measures across the country from midnight Monday 5 October for a period of four weeks. The details of these measures as provided for in the 'Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: View the Plan for Living with COVID-19' are set out in the Appendix.**

The NPHE is sensitive to the impact that these measures will have on individuals, families, communities, businesses and organisations. But it firmly believes that taking this action proactively for four weeks from now is the only opportunity to get this disease back under control while keeping schools open, keeping health services for non-COVID activity operational and protecting the medically and socially vulnerable.

The NPHE advises that the profile of the disease is such that a graduated approach will not have sufficient or timely impact on the trajectory and scale of the disease and will not protect the core priorities set out above. A graduated approach would, ultimately, result in application of Level 5 measures as mitigation. In contrast, the immediate application of Level 5 is intended to limit the impact on public health of COVID-19 while:

- Preventing unnecessary disruption to non-COVID health and social care services particularly given the impact on those services in the first half of 2020
- Protecting medically and socially vulnerable people and
- Proactively protecting against and averting significant disruption to childcare and education.

The measures proposed will only be effective if there is broad societal buy-in and adherence over the coming four-week period. The response in Ireland throughout this pandemic has been underpinned by widespread public understanding, support and buy-in and a continuing demonstration of national solidarity. The NPHET appreciates how difficult it will be for everyone to return to this level of restrictions, but it is confident that people across Ireland can once again meet this challenge with determination and unity of purpose. Solidarity must continue to be the bedrock of our approach, and the need for intergenerational solidarity has never been greater.

The NPHET further recommends that:

- There is continuing emphasis on communications and inspection and enforcement regimes in supporting and facilitating adherence to these public health measures. The NPHET emphasises that these issues require renewed commitment with sustained and cohesive cross-sectoral and multi-agency support and leadership.
- The introduction of Level 5 measures be accompanied by comprehensive and consistent communications. These communications should provide clarity on the measures in place, on why those measures are in place and on what each individual, organisation and employer can do to suppress the virus.
- Powers available under public health and other legislation are fully and visibly utilised to support and reinforce adherence to public health measures.
- There be immediate activation by all State agencies and other bodies of all necessary processes, plans, supports and measures to ensure the necessary services are available to those who need them over the coming four weeks, including physical and mental health and social care services.
- There be continued development and strengthening of a whole of Government and cross society approach (including representation from young people, sport, the arts and business) to develop and implement solutions aimed at increasing awareness of and compliance with public health advice among young people given the particular impacts of these public health measures on their lives.

A number of other measures will be given further consideration in the coming days and weeks by NPHET such as:

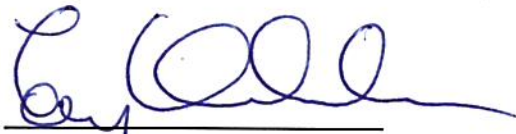
- Further enhancing our public health surveillance and control capacity particularly testing, contact tracing and case and outbreak management
- Testing, surveillance and other protective measures for healthcare workers.

NPHET also noted the epidemiological situation in Northern Ireland and recommended continued close engagement between jurisdictions in relation to the strategic approach to COVID over the coming days.

The NPHE 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 blue 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

## Appendix: Proposed Measures under Level 5 of the Framework

In effect a move to Level 5 means:

- No visitors to private homes/gardens
- No social/family gatherings to take place in other settings, either indoors or outdoors
- Up to 6 guests only are permitted at weddings
- No organised indoor gatherings should take place
- No organised outdoor gatherings should take place
- No matches or sports events are permitted – exemption for professional/elite/ senior inter-county/horse-racing behind closed doors
- Individual training only is permitted both indoors and outdoors. No exercise or dance classes are permitted.
- Gyms/leisure centres/swimming pools are closed
- Places of worship remain open for private prayer only, with religious services moving online. An exemption is provided for funerals, which can proceed with up to 10 mourners permitted
- The vast majority of public venues, shops, businesses and services to close, including:
  - museums, galleries, libraries and tourism and cultural attractions
  - Restaurants, bars and cafes (including hotel restaurants and bars and wet bars) are open for takeaway food or delivery only.
  - Nightclubs, discos and casinos remain closed.
  - Hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs are open only for those with essential non-social and non-tourist purposes.
  - Caravan parks
  - Only essential retail is permitted to open. All other retail and personal services are closed.
- Work from home unless work is an essential health, social care, for education purposes, or other essential services and cannot be done from home.
- Public transport should be reserved for essential workers and essential purposes only, and should operate at 25% capacity only. (Current provisions will continue to apply to school transport).
- Everyone should stay at home in all circumstances, with the following exemptions:
  - Essential work, medical appointments, vital family reasons, farming
  - Exercise within 5km of home.
- LTRC Facilities visiting: suspended, aside from critical and compassionate circumstances
- Over 70s and medically vulnerable: specific guidance (no change from level 2,3,4)
  - Staying at home as much as possible is recommended.
  - While each person should exercise individual judgement regarding the extent to which they engage with others, it is strongly recommended to limit this to a very small network, for short periods of time, while remaining physically distanced.
  - When taking exercise outdoors, maintain 2 metre distance from others and wash hands on returning home.
  - Public transport should be avoided.
  - Shopping during designated hours only while wearing a face covering is recommended. Family, friends and neighbours may be able to provide assistance



with shopping once they adhere to physical distancing guidelines, alternatively, online services may be considered.

- Designated shopping hours and Community Call will need to be stood up

The following should remain open, with appropriate protective measures in place:

- Schools, early learning and childcare services
- Higher and adult education: the vast majority of programmes should be online, with exemptions only for essential on-site activities including practicals, laboratory and clinical placements.
- Outdoor playgrounds, play areas and parks remain open.