

## COVID-19 Strategic Intelligence Group

05 July 2021 at 12:00 – Zoom Video Conference

### Present:

Professor Ian Young (Chair)	Chief Scientific Advisor, DoH
Professor Sir Michael McBride	Chief Medical Officer, DoH
Dr Lourda Geoghegan	DCMO, DoH
Dr Joanne McClean	DCMO, DoH
Dr Declan Bradley	Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor, DoH
Professor Stuart Elborn	Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor, School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, QUB
Dr Eugene Mooney	Director of Information and Analysis, DoH
Dr Liz Mitchell	Chair of Contact Tracing Service Steering Group, DoH
Professor Fiona Alderdice	Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford
Professor Frank Kee	Centre for Public Health, QUB
Professor Diarmuid O'Donovan	Professor of Global Health, Centre for Public Health, QUB
Dr Nicola Armstrong	Programme Manager, PHA
Jonathan Norwood	DoH (Secretariat)

### Apologies:

Dr Naresh Chada	DCMO, DoH
Dr Stephen Bergin	Director Public Health (Interim), PHA
Professor Duncan Morrow	Director of Civic Engagement & Student Affairs, Ulster University
Dr Gerry Waldron	Assistant Director of Public Health – Health Protection, PHA
Kieran McAteer	COVID-19 Response, DoH

## Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

1. Prof Young welcomed all participants back to the meeting.

- Apologies were as noted.
- 'Paper 1 - Minutes of SIG Meeting of 07 June' were accepted.
- All actions are complete.

## Status Update

2. Prof Young provided an update on the current position:

**Current estimate of  $R_t$  (new positive tests): 1.2-1.6 (7 days previous 1.2-1.5)**

**Current estimate of  $R_t$  (hospital admissions): too low for reliable estimate**

**Average number of new positive tests per day last 7 days: 218 (7 days previous 145)**

**7 day incidence based on new positive tests: 80.3 / 100k (7 days previous 53.3)**

**14 day incidence based on new positive tests: 134 / 100k (7 days previous 88.2)**

**7 day average of total positive individuals (pillar 1 & 2): 2.3% (7 days previous 1.5%)**

**7 day daily average tests completed: 10,903 (7 days previous 9,777)**

**Number of new positive tests in over 60s in last 7 days: 74 (7 days previous 42)**

**Proportion of total positive tests occurring in over 60s: 4.6% (7 day previous 3.9%)**

**First COVID +ve hospital admission in last week: 19 (7 days previous 8)**

**Number of community acquired COVID inpatients: 13 (7 days previous 10)**

**COVID +ve ICU patients: 2 (7 days previous 0)**

- There has been a substantial increase in  $R_t$  in terms of cases and  $R_t$  is now close to 1.50.
- Test positivity is increasing significantly.
- The 11-18s and 18-30s age groups show the most rapidly increasing case numbers. These are the groups where vaccination is less common. All age groups show an increase in numbers.

- LGD data shows that Derry City and Strabane has risen to 340/100k and large parts of NI are above 100/100k; everywhere is over 50/100k.
- The Delta variant is now the dominant variant in NI.
- Comparisons within the CTA shows that NI's rates remain lower than Scotland and England.
- 0.14% (1 in 720) of the NI population has COVID-19 according to the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey.
- Hospital admissions and occupancy are both increasing.
- Modelling shows that NI is tracking significantly above the central scenario. Prof Young gave an overview of two scenarios; by the end of July having:
  - i. 85% of the adult population vaccinated with one dose; and
  - ii. 90% of the adult population vaccinated with one dose.
- Ultimately, the extra 5% will half the peaks.
- The age distribution of those hospitalised was discussed.

### **Adherence Group: (Slides 1)**

3. Dr Bradley presented slides detailing an overview of the '*COVID-19 Research Report Wave 1*' and included respondents' information such as:
  - Interview process;
  - Demographics;
  - Vaccine Status;
  - Testing;
  - Behaviours such as willingness to self-isolate;
  - Employment status;
  - Risk perception;
  - Travel history;
  - Household and social contacts; and
  - Group contacts.

- Dr Bradley agreed to circulate the presentation to colleagues to aid wider learning across sectors.
- Confidence intervals were discussed and further work is ongoing by Queen's on the report. Prof Young thanked Queen's colleagues for their continuing efforts.
- Comparisons with other nations was discussed. Sampling of respondents and strategies to incentivise unvaccinated groups was also discussed.
- Prof Kee gave an overview of motivational reasoning and the group discussed some psychological explanations.
- The main focus is to maximise vaccine uptake and the group discussed ethical considerations of vaccine recipients, which the next paper outlines.

## **JAMA: Ethical Considerations of Offering Benefits to COVID-19 Vaccine Recipients (Paper 2)**

### 4. Prof Young asked for comments on the paper:

- He highlighted several key areas such as knowledge and awareness, removal of barriers and incentives.
- Prof McBride reflected on the ethical aspects and incentives. Much of the ongoing work improves communication and awareness and gets people thinking about vaccination.
- The group discussed linking with the commercial sector. Careful thought is required around linking with companies that do not have obvious health links.
- Is writing to everyone not yet vaccinated worthwhile? A huge amount of energy is required to update infrastructure to make this route successful.
- Collaborating with Translink to give free travel to vaccine centres for those unvaccinated was discussed.
- Prof Elborn cautioned future vaccine programmes where people might expect incentives.
- 'Everyone is eligible for a vaccine' should be the message.
- Prof McBride reflected on the social movement of 'being part of something' and how we are all in this together.
- There being no further comments, the group noted the paper.

## **Impacts of School Closures on Physical and Mental Health of Children and Young People (Paper 3)**

5. Prof Young asked for comments on the paper:

- This is a key area for the future and will be discussed in depth soon. Dr Geoghegan commented that the Secretary of State has highlighted this as a key focus area. The group will return to this over the summer.
- There being no further business, the group noted the paper.

### **AOB**

6. Prof Young asked the group to raise any further items for discussion and there being no further business, the meeting closed.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

7. The next meeting will be on Monday 19 July 2021 at Noon via Zoom.