

COVID-19 Strategic Intelligence Group

18 October 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	Associate DCMO, DoH
Dr Naresh Chada	DCMO, DoH
Professor Stuart Elborn	Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor, School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, QUB
Professor Frank McKee	Centre for Public Health, QUB
Professor Duncan Morrow	Director of Civic Engagement & Student Affairs, Ulster University
Professor Fiona Alderdice	Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford
Professor Diarmuid O'Donovan	Professor of Global Health, Centre for Public Health, QUB
Dr Bríd Farrell	Acting Director for Public Health, PHA
Dr Nicola Armstrong	Programme Manager, PHA
Dr Eugene Mooney	Director of Information and Analysis, DoH
Dr Liz Mitchell	Chair of Contact Tracing Service Steering Group, DoH
Jonathan Norwood	DoH (Secretariat)

Apologies:

Dr Declan Bradley	Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor, DoH
Kieran McAteer	Director Covid Responses Directorate, DoH

Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

1. Prof Young welcomed all participants back to the meeting.
 - Apologies were as noted above.
 - Minutes from the previous meeting (**Paper 1**) were agreed.

Update on Disease Status

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

Current estimate of R_t (new positive tests): 1.05-1.20 (7 days previous 0.95-1.05)

Current estimate of R_t (hospital admissions): 0.90-1.10 (7 days previous 0.70-0.90)

Average number of new positive tests per day last 7 days: 1268 (7 days previous 1117)

7 day incidence based on new positive tests: 467 / 100k (7 days previous 412)

14 day incidence based on new positive tests: 881 / 100k (7 days previous 819)

7 day average of total positive individuals (pillar 1 & 2): 7.4% (7 days previous 5.8%)

7 day daily average tests completed: 17,797 (7 days previous 17,945)

Number of new positive tests in over 60s in last 7 days: 961 (8 days previous 773)

Proportion of total positive tests occurring in over 60s: 10.8% (9 days previous 9.8%)

First COVID +ve hospital admission in last week: 198 (7 days previous 157)

Number of community acquired COVID inpatients: 331 (7 days previous 316)

COVID +ve ICU patients: 35 (7 days previous 37)

- Testing and test positivity remain at very high levels.
- All age groups are increasing and are highest in the 0-15s.
- All LGDs have plateaued.
- Prof Young presented a graph detailing scenario projections and SPI-M modelling.
- The group discussed vaccination and waning immunity.
- Indoor interactions and adherence to mitigations were also discussed.
- There are huge uncertainties and we need to provide a nimble, rapid response when required.

SPI-M-O: Summary Autumn Winter Scenarios to SAGE (Paper 2)

SPI-M-O: Summary Reimposition to SAGE (Paper 3)

Considerations for Potential Impact of Plan B Measures (Paper 4)

SPI-B: Behavioural Considerations for Maintaining or Reintroducing Behavioural Interventions and Introducing New Measures in Autumn 2021 (Paper 5)

3. Professor Young provided a brief overview of the papers:

- The impact and effectiveness of different restrictions was discussed. Applying restrictions at an early stage and in a coordinated way would likely be most effective.
- Working from home would have significant impact if carried out effectively albeit having economic consequences.
- Face coverings and ventilation were highlighted as important mitigations.
- New variants were discussed.
- What is the trigger to introduce interventions? SAGE has not identified a trigger and further work is required in this area. A simple quantitative trigger is not possible; wider consideration of many other factors will be required.
- Dr Geoghegan reflected on behaviours and the importance of good behaviours to prolong the need to trigger interventions.
- Dr Armstrong reflected on communication to the public and it must be as simple as possible. She informed the group that further work is being done by behavioural teams within council areas such as environmental visits.
- The group discussed enforcement of mitigations within hospitality.
- Prof McBride reflected on the uncertainty to model beyond 4+ weeks. He also emphasised the importance of behavioural changes required to sustain us through the winter months. Adherence to mitigations within hospitality was highlighted.
- Prof Alderdice reflected on enabling. Ventilation is a key enabling measure.

EMG: Update on Transmission and Environmental and Behavioural Mitigation Strategies (Paper 6)

4. Professor Young provided a brief overview of the paper:

- This paper reinforces lessons learnt in the early stages of the epidemic.

- Prof Elborn reflected on the methods highlighted in the paper to reduce risks.

ACTION: Prof Young to Forward to Adherence Group.

NERVTAG: Coinfections (Paper 7)

5. Professor Young provided a brief overview of the paper:

- Coinfections and multiplex testing were discussed.
- RSV has been seen in children.
- Dr Farrell provided a high level update on testing stock. She updated the group on influenza and RSV numbers detected to date.

The Impact of Mandatory COVID-19 Certificates on Vaccine Uptake (Paper 8)

6. Professor Young provided a brief overview of the paper:

- There is evidence to suggest that mandatory certificates increases vaccine uptake.
- Prof McBride reflected on reducing transmission in high risk environments and the data from these studies is very helpful.
- RoI had planned to remove mandatory certificates and are now reconsidering.

AOB

7. Professor Young asked the group to raise any further items for discussion:

- Prof Alderdice reflected on messaging and that the evidence we have gathered over the previous 18 months should help our messaging. There being no further business, the meeting closed.

Date of Next Meeting

8. The next meeting will be on Monday 15th November 2021 at Noon via Zoom.