

# COVID-19 Strategic Intelligence Group

19 July 2021 at 12:00 – Zoom Video Conference

## Present:

Professor Ian Young (Chair)	Chief Scientific Advisor, DoH
Dr Lourda Geoghegan	DCMO, DoH
Dr Declan Bradley	Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor, DoH
Dr Bríd Farrell	Acting Director for Public Health, PHA
Professor Fiona Alderdice	Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford
Professor Duncan Morrow	Director of Civic Engagement & Student Affairs, Ulster University
Professor Diarmuid O'Donovan	Professor of Global Health, Centre for Public Health, QUB
Dr Nicola Armstrong	Programme Manager, PHA
Sara Higgins	DoH (Secretariat)

## Apologies:

Professor Sir Michael McBride	Chief Medical Officer, DoH
Professor Frank McKee	Centre for Public Health, QUB
Dr Eugene Mooney	Director of Information and Analysis, DoH
Professor Stuart Elborn	Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor, School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, QUB
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.
  - Minutes from previous meeting agreed.

## Status Update

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

- Number of cases is rising rapidly – averaging 750 per day. Test positivity is also increasing.
- All age groups are seeing an increase in positive cases, particularly among younger age groups.
- Belfast has seen a significant increase in the last 7 days – last week 248 positive cases, this week 639. Cases also rising in outlying Council Areas including Ards & North Down and Antrim & Newtownabbey.
- Cases in Derry and Strabane have now stabilised.
- Hospital admissions – currently three doubling away from peak of previous waves bed occupancy.
- Meeting is scheduled with hospital trusts Chief Executives to discuss hospital admissions.
- 50% of admissions are made up of younger non vaccinated – medium age mid 50. Remaining 50% of admissions made up of single or double vaccinated individuals – age range of late 60s to early 70s.
- Vaccination programme 83% of adult population have received their 1<sup>st</sup> dose – this is 5% behind England, 7% behind Scotland and 8% behind Wales. 16% of NI population remain unvaccinated.
- Uptake lower among 18-30 and 30-40 age group.
- Dr Farrell commented that this is at odds with childhood vaccination programme where uptake has always been favourable.
- Professor Young advises that all avenues are being used to increase vaccination uptake & requested suggestions of other communication methods that could be used. Sure Start programmes & vaccinations being offered at ante-natal appointments suggested
- Delta variant now accounts for 100% of positive cases.
- Central modelling is being followed however in the last few days the number of positive cases has tracked above the central model.
- Central modelling – tracks 3500 daily cases at the peak. Pessimistic modelling tracks 8500 daily cases at the peak.
- Professor Young advised that the NI Executive is to make further announcements on Thursday re the relaxation of restrictions – Health advice would be that further

relaxations would not be appropriate at this time but there was an acknowledgement that ultimately decision would be for the Executive – all on the call in agreement.

Dr Bradley provided an update on study being undertaken in England re denominator & hospital admission:

- Results of this study are still not available but will share with group when become available.
- It is thought that 40,000 of GP registered population in NI has now moved away – thus vaccine uptake could be higher than initially thought.
- As of 18/07/21 – 2 patients in ICU, smaller number of patients transition to critical care, therefore pressure may be more focused on general bed capacity rather than ICU.

### Warwick Road Map

3. Professor Young provided a brief overview of the Warwick Road Map paper – key points:
  - Wide variety of outcomes and what happens in the next few weeks will be dependent upon what we know;
  - For example, if the believed vaccine 95% effectiveness was determined to be even 1% less the potential impact it could have on outcomes

### Bristol Paper

4. Professor Young provided a brief overview on the Bristol paper:
  - Looks at maintaining restrictions and advising caution.
  - UK Gov messaging has changed from Freedom day to Proceed with Caution – however this change in messaging has been lost in the media.
  - Dr Geoghegan queried where it was anticipated we would top out in terms of numbers. Professor Young advised that Scotland had already topped and numbers were on the decline. At its peak 400-450 per 100,000 per 7 days.
  - Important to point out 2 differences though; Scotland had initially a small % of the population with antibodies before current wave and they are also 7% ahead of NI in terms of first dose vaccinations, may have put a break on current spread.

## **Academy of Medical Sciences Paper**

5. Professor Young advised this will be discussed at the next meeting.

## **AOB**

6. Professor 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 16 August 2021 at Noon via Zoom.