

COVID-19 Strategic Intelligence Group

2pm, 27 April 2020, Zoom Video Conference

Present:

Professor Ian Young	Chief Scientific Officer, DOH
Dr Michael McBride	Chief Medical Officer, DOH
Fiona Alderdice	Professor in Perinatal Health and Wellbeing, Queen's University
Frank Kee	Queen's University
Eugene Mooney	Director of IAD, DOH
Dan West	Chief Digital Information Officer
Declan Bradley	PHA
Cathy Gormley-Heenan	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and External Affairs)
Diarmuid O'Donnell	Professor Public Health, Queens/PHA
Dr Gillian Anderson	Senior Medical Officer, DOH
Professor Stuart Elborn	Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor, School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences
Seamus Camplisson	Principal, Health Protection Branch
Craig Donnachie	DOH, Loggist

Introduction & Purpose of the Group

1. Prof Ian Young welcomed the group and made introductions. He indicated that the purpose of the group was to consider and advise on the scientific and technical concepts and processes that are key to understanding the evolving COVID-19 situation, potential impacts in Northern Ireland and measures to mitigate these.
2. It was emphasised that this group was being established to review scientific evidence, not to make policy decisions. Any papers shared with the group, would be done so on a confidential basis.
3. A terms of reference for the group has been circulated in advance of the meeting and outlines its objectives and governance arrangements.

Presentation on Current Status of COVID-19 in Northern Ireland

4. Prof Young shared a presentation on the current status of COVID-19 in Northern Ireland with the group. This highlighted the current trends in relation to the spread of the disease and information about the effectiveness of the lockdown arrangements in reducing social interaction.
5. The group were advised that prior to the implementation of the current lockdown arrangements, we were seeing a R_0 of 2.8. In any relaxation of these restrictions, it is essential to ensure that the R_0 figure remained below 1 in order to avoid an increase in the epidemic. Prof Young showed the group modelling to demonstrate the possible impact in terms of the number of critical care cases that could be expected if the R_0 figure increased above 1 following any relaxation of the current lockdown.

Key Priorities for the Group

6. Prof Young and Dr McBride advised the group that contact tracing, testing and isolation will be the key first priority for the group. Offers of support in establishing the contact tracing service were received from both Universities. Dr McBride advised that all offers of support would be gratefully received.
7. It was agreed that Prof Young would liaise with the Universities about access to information that they require to support this work. **[Action: Prof Young]**
8. It was also highlighted that there was already a cohort of students from both Universities working within the HSC to support the COVID response. As demands across the HSC are reducing, these students could be moved into a contact tracing role.
9. The issue of the wider health and social care impacts associated with lockdown were discussed. It was confirmed that the Department is committed to looking at the totality of impacts associated with lockdown, not just restricted to the impact on COVID-19. Work is already underway in respect of this.

Future Meetings of the Group

10. It was agreed that the group would meet twice weekly, on a Monday and a Thursday, at 2pm. Meetings would be convened using the Zoom video-conferencing.