

# Northern Ireland Office

## Covid 19

### Situation Report **18**

New information in **RED**

Contact: [Covid-19@nio.gov.uk](mailto:Covid-19@nio.gov.uk)

**All emails relating to Covid-19 should be copied to this address.**

**17:30 on 3 April 2020**

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# KEY ISSUES

1. **Data and access to PPE** - Key focus is ensuring NIE provides key data on PPE so UK-wide decisions can be made. NICS have now submitted a formal request for UKG assistance on PPE, on which an internal UKG decision has been taken on providing NI with areas of PPE where there is less than a month's worth of supply. Transmission and announcement is expected over the weekend (as trailed by Matt Hancock at 1730). We expect remaining data issues for UK dashboard to be resolved next week.
2. **Connectivity and freight** - NI-GB transport and haulage links have decreased significantly in line with reduced demand, raising risks to the the supply of essential goods. The NIO and NICS are plugged into DfT's Freight Taskforce and are identifying mitigations to address these issues, including ensuring essential maritime crossings. Air routes are also significantly reduced due to low passenger numbers but this does not affect freight. CODA airport may need to close temporarily and the Belfast airports are operating at a loss but with access to Government-backed finance and furloughing scheme etc.
3. **Testing** - this is an increasing political issue across the UK. Paper to be tabled at Health MIG on Tuesday next week. DHSC has set out a plan for allocating tests on a 4 nations basis, to address testing needs of key workers in addition to workers in health and social care. The aim is to maximize benefit or each test allocated. NIE keen to see allocation on population basis rather than on disease incidence or number of deaths.
4. **Executive disagreement** - NI's Deputy First Minister has criticised the Health Ministers handling of outbreak. Speaking on BBC NI's The View Min O'Neill commented that "Slavishly following the Boris Johnson model, which has been too slow to act, means we are not as prepared as we could be" However Min O'Neill committed to working with the Health Minister going forward. The other parties have called for the Executive to collectively work together.

# Overview

## NI Update

## UK Position

Case Numbers (as of 3 April)

England **31,797** (28,221)

Wales **2466** (2121)

Scotland **3001** (2602)

Northern Ireland **904** (774)

**TOTAL 38,168** (33,718)

Deaths (NI) **48** (36)

Deaths (UK) **3605** (2921)

Republic of Ireland cases: **3849** (3447)

### Government Announcements:

- **DHSC announced that 5m items of PPE will be delivered to Northern Ireland.**
- **The Nightingale hospital opened today in East London.**
- **The Queen will address the nation on Sunday**

**Update from NICS:** Letters to NI's clinically vulnerable patients have issued from DoH to GPs and are now being issued to patients. Focus for DoH remains on surge planning. Work continues on PPE and testing, with a Testing Expert Group to conclude its strategy later today. Criteria for prioritising PPE for non Healthcare workers is also expected today. Planning for Critical Workers' children for the Easter period progressing, with a higher expectation in pupil numbers expected and planned for by DE. Health and Safety Executive NI reporting fewer social distancing complaints to last week, although requests for evidential statistics on this has been commissioned from all NI Departments. New NI Comms portal working well, with 750K views - new TV and business ads to issue next week. While disagreements within the Executive were made public by dFM, at their daily press conference they presented a united 'working' front. Confusion remains over whether NI will benefit from a PPE shipment delivered to Irish Govt. It has transpired that NIE was not part of the order, but NI Finance and Health Ministers have written to RoI seeking access to it. Randox, who are fulfilling a UK wide testing order, have reported that NI's proportion of testing kits will be sent directly to partners in NI,

**Update from Irish:** HMA Dublin reported that Covid-19 continues to be the focus in Dublin but energies are also split trying to form a new government. Though, there remains little sign of a Government in the coming days. Social distancing measures appear to be having some positive effect. While absolute numbers of infections rise, there has been a slow-down in the rate of growth. The Irish have been testing more than the UK, but beginning to face the same issue of a lack of supply of chemicals which means they will reduce their testing to 1500 per day.

**UKG:** We understand that No.10's focus today has been on critical care capacity across the UK as numbers from Scotland (showing a steep decline in capacity) and the first numbers from Northern Ireland (generally low capacity) have caused significant concern. CCS have been linking into the DAs on this today. We will continue to monitor developments.

**NI Economy:** Responding to concerns about cashflow in small and medium sized businesses, HMT has revised the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) to allow "viable" small businesses affected by Covid-19 to apply. Additionally, HMT have introduced the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS) providing a Government guarantee of 80% to enable loans of up to £25 million for larger firms with an annual turnover of between £45 million and £500 million. Conservative estimate is that 17-18k employees are furloughed and 5k individuals have been made redundant .

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# Policy Challenges

**International** - The Irish system remains under significant pressure as work is being stepped up to form a Government. This means that there is limited bandwidth in the Irish system to accommodate a BIC and they are keen to have a Trilateral coordination meeting between senior UKG, IG and NIE officials first. **A trilateral meeting is being discussed presently, with a possible date of April 6 for further meeting.** A BIC with the current government is a possibility with a BIIGC delayed until the new government is established.

**Preparedness** - SoSNI attended the General Public Sector MIG today which covered prisons and support for non-shielded socially and financially vulnerable people. Justice matters are devolved in NI and on Monday Naomi Long announced the NIE's intention to release some prisoners early due to COVID-19. The NIE have identified clear risks to the current provision of services to vulnerable groups. Across local and voluntary services, risks identified include staff absences and sickness leading to a reduced service, and a shortage of PPE. Services are adapting but further solutions are needed where a gap in provision has been identified. This is also likely to require additional funding for the voluntary and communities sector.

**Health** - Work is ongoing with CCS, CO and NICS to improve upon the NI data being reflected in the UK Dashboard focusing on **outstanding** datasets. The NI Executive and IG announced yesterday intentions to sign a MoU this week formalising co-ordination and cooperation on Covid 19. **NICS have now submitted a formal request for UKG assistance on PPE, on which an internal UKG decision has been taken on providing NI with areas of PPE where there is less than a month's worth of supply. Transmission and announcement is expected over the weekend. Working with DHSC and Randox to clarify distribution of testing supplies to Northern Ireland.**

**Legislation** - DHSC setting up reporting mechanism to publicly report every two months on how the powers in the Coronavirus Act are being utilised. NIO will be represented at the project management calls.

**Comms** - The Cabinet Office is compiling a bid for comms campaign funding relating to CV-19, and the NIO will input a top-line bid tomorrow, including for research and insight. DHSC is planning another phase of "Stay at Home" ads across the UK, which have been run past NICS. The central hub is working on a campaign to celebrate workers keeping the economy going and NIO is developing a complementary campaign highlighting advice to businesses to stay open as far as it is safe to do so. **The Health Sec announced at the 1700 press conference that NI will be receiving extra PPE - NIO was not warned of this announcement in advance. SoSNI will support on social media. We are also likely to tweet about Randox to clarify the issue around claims testing kits being distributed via GB.**

**Economy** - There have been appeals for the Government to start matching underused resources in term of labour / assets for closed sectors to those industries with shortages and this is being explored by NICS. UKG and NIE are making revisions to support schemes to ensure that they apply to more businesses and resolve issues that some, mainly small, businesses have been having in regards to accessing them. Businesses are continuing to find communications and guidance on the financial schemes difficult to navigate. NIO are currently updating the guidance on Gov.uk to reflect the announcements by HMT on the Business Interruption Loan Schemes, to clarify the information available to them

# NIO

Resource	Critical Business
<p><b>NIO Figures for 3 April</b></p> <p>Working in the office / travelling 3(4)  Working at home 162(169)  Self Isolating - symptoms - still working 2(2)  Family Isolating - no symptoms - still working 6 (7)  Self Isolating - confirmed - still working 0 (1)  Sick - Covid 0(1)  Sick- other 1(1)  Special Leave 0 (0)  Other leave / NWD 15 (4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both sites remain open; Prime Minister's announcement on evening of Mon 23 March reinforced need to work from home.</li> <li>Those working in office continue to be significantly reduced with corresponding rise in numbers working at home.</li> <li>Easter leave commitments will be reviewed to ensure critical business continues</li> <li>HR working on shift patterns and allowances as well as absence returns to Cabinet Office; C3 shifts are priority work-in-progress</li> <li>Ongoing work on new starter arrangements</li> <li>Vetting process is being restricted to business critical staff; staff are able to have existing clearance extended 1 year</li> </ul>	<p><b>Human Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Impact Assessment completed and has been submitted to PUS and SofS</li> <li>Process to move staff into priority areas has begun, with retraining taking place</li> <li>All DDs have completed an assessment of critical business, along with those tasks where office requirement remains</li> <li>First tranche of staff moves now complete</li> <li>Keyworker guidance issued in NI, and process underway</li> <li>SofS has now signed off prioritisation; this has been issued to DDs</li> <li>SSCL moving to email only service</li> </ul> <p><b>IT/Networks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Network capacity will continue to be monitored with IT Assist to ensure business continuity; network capacity has increased fivefold to 5Gbps following work on Tuesday evening</li> <li>IT kit being gradually delivered to households this week</li> <li>Covid-19 Hub is live on Intranet, with NIO Social page</li> <li>Guidance is being prepared for use of Zoom/Hangouts</li> </ul> <p><b>Emergency Response Team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NI Hub is live</li> <li>ERT full will continue to meet weekly alongside two BDG-specific sub meetings</li> </ul> <p><b>Estates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HG is closing one entrance; guidance to follow on intranet</li> </ul>



# Forward Look

## PM C-19 Strategy

Weekend: Saturday: Vaccines update [CSA]; Vaccines envoy [FCO and DFID] Sunday: [TBC] LRFs - overall resilience [MHCLG]

Confirmed: Monday: Vaccines and Drugs [CMO/CSA] Tuesday: Death management [CO]

Potential focus items later in the week to include economy impacts and universal credit and antibody testing, piece on UK impacts and DA perspectives - NIO CO Liaison to confirm

C-19 Strategy (O) - CabSec chaired: Agenda TBC but may include the following (please note provisional and subject to change - NIO CO Liaison to confirm):.

Monday: [TBC] Differential impacts of social distancing (focus on ethnic groups, socioeconomic, regional); [TBC] Death Management [CO, MHCLG, MoJ]

Tuesday: [TBC - poss. small group] Deep dive on cross-UK impact of economic measures [HMT]; [TBC] Review of UK wide delivery risks [CO]

## International MIG:

Monday: Repatriation [FCO] and Overseas Territories [FCO lead/MOD/DFID]

Tuesday: Repatriation, Civil Preparedness Engagement - EU and NATO [all FCO leads]

## Economic MIG:

Tuesday: Wage subsidy and furloughing - including how best to utilise furloughed workers [various, including HMT, HMRC, DfE, DCMS], sectoral guidance on workplace social distancing (BEIS), and Government engagement and communication with business (CO). The secretariat are currently working up a forward look (to include w/c 13th April). A paper/discussion looking at economic recovery in the longer term is expected on 14th April (tbc).

## Healthcare MIG:

Tuesday: Impact of social distancing measures and next steps (DHSC); Social care resilience (DHSC); Update on delivery of shielding support (MHCLG)

Thursday: Prioritisation of testing (DHSC); Volunteering (DHSC). Yesterday's discussion on DA coordination did not reach agreement, so the HMIG Secretariat will schedule a follow-up discussion with DHSC and the DAs on developing a consistent Covid-19 response across the UK.

## Public Services MIG

The forward TBC as dependent on departments having completed analysis in time - The agenda for next week is still in flux but may include the following (please note indicative and subject to change)

Saturday: Forward look [core group only]

Monday: [TBC] Update on School Provision [DfE]; [TBC] Update on plans for redeploying workers across the public sector [CO]

Tuesday: [TBC] Death Management (CO, MHCLG, MoJ); Freight resilience and border flow [DfT/HO]. We understand that several departments have received offers of support from businesses; CCS are pulling together these offers into one place for triage. This is likely to be discussed at Tuesday GPS MIG. Two official-level groups on death management - one with representatives from the funeral sector (met 2/4/20) and a x-Whitehall excess deaths working group which met today 3/4/20, nothing NI specific at this stage but NIO CO Liaison to update

## Other:

Cabinet Office's UKGG are looking to coordinate a weekly call with DA ministers which will provide an update on IMIG. This will complement existing official level calls which cover the various MIGs e.g. Union catch-up and daily coordination calls.

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