

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride**



BY EMAIL

To: All NI Departments through the Civil Contingencies Group, for onward distribution to all public authorities

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Your Ref:

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Dear Colleagues,

**CORONAVIRUS: (A) KEY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVICE
(B) ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES**

- 1 The purpose of this letter is to enable all NI Executive Departments and public authorities to prepare to respond to any and all potential eventualities arising from the current novel coronavirus outbreak. It is essential that all Departments are assured that proportionate, appropriate and efficient arrangements are in place that are consistent with the key public health messages about novel coronavirus.
- 2 Each NI Department is asked to ensure that the letter is distributed to each public authority that they sponsor.

Coronavirus: key facts

- 3 Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some of which cause illness in people, ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as MERS and SARS. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. The 2019-nCoV strain is a strain not previously seen in humans. On 31 December 2019 Chinese authorities notified the World Health Organisation of an outbreak of viral pneumonia in Wuhan City. The virus has crossed the species barrier and we assume it has come from infected animals at a seafood and wildlife market in Wuhan. On 30 January 2020 the WHO designated the 2019-nCoV outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. In response the UK CMOs advised that governments should raise the risk in the UK from low to moderate in order that all governments could plan for all eventualities.
- 4 Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with

weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

- 5 The majority of the cases to date have been in Wuhan and mainland China. Before the outbreak there were three direct flights from Wuhan to London Heathrow per week. These have now been suspended by the Chinese authorities. Direct flights from other parts of China land at Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester. British Airways and Virgin Atlantic have suspended all direct flights to and from mainland China. There are no direct flights between China and Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. As this is an evolving situation travel from other countries may also become relevant.

Coronavirus: key public health advice

- 6 The following advice has been prepared for the benefit of any individual who may be concerned about the risk of contracting coronavirus. This is highly precautionary advice intended to limit the potential spread of infection.
- 7 If a person has travelled from Wuhan or Hubei Province to the UK in the last 14 days they should immediately:
 - stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as they would with the flu, and
 - call their GP to inform them of their recent travel to the country.
- 8 This advice should be followed even if the person does not have symptoms of the virus.
- 9 If a person has travelled from anywhere in China (but not Macao or Hong Kong) to the UK in the last 14 days and develops symptoms of cough, fever or shortness of breath, they should immediately:
 - stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as they would with the flu and
 - call their GP to inform them of their recent travel to the country
- 10 This advice should be followed even if the symptoms are minor.
- 11 As the numbers of cases outside of mainland China increases, this advice may be extended to include other countries.
- 12 Individuals are advised to take simple, common-sense steps to avoid close contact with other people as much as possible, as they would with other flu-like viruses. This means remaining at home for 14 days after arriving from Wuhan or Hubei Province (or elsewhere in China if they have symptoms) and not going to work, school or public areas. Where possible, in these circumstances, people should avoid having visitors to their home. It is safe for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food or run errands.

- 13 The person should not use public transport or taxis until 14 days after their return from Wuhan or Hubei Province (or elsewhere in China in the case of a person with symptoms).
- 14 People with school-age children should, where possible, contact a friend or family member and ask them to take their children to school.
- 15 This is an evolving situation and the public health advice has been changing in response to emerging information from China about the number of cases and spread of the infection from person to person.
- 16 Anyone who develops a fever, a cough or shortness of breath and has returned from mainland China should continue to follow the advice above. They should not leave their home and should call their GP immediately. They should not attend their GP or local Emergency Department in person unless or until they are advised to do so by a medical practitioner.
- 17 Up-to-date information and advice can be found at
<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/advice-2019-ncov-novel-coronavirus>
and
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>.
- 18 Advice for members of the public who have returned from China in the past 14 days, or who have been in contact with a confirmed case of novel Coronavirus, is available from a dedicated **helpline**, on **0300 200 7885**. This service operates 24 hours a day.
- 19 Public information posters are on display in primary and secondary care settings, ports and airports. Education-specific posters will be distributed to schools, FE and HE institutions.

Coronavirus: actions to be taken by public authorities

- 20 The Department of Health (NI) and other NI Departments have received queries from a range of public authorities and other sources about what action they should take in response to the 2019-nCoV outbreak. The Department of Health is closely monitoring the outbreak as it develops.

At this stage the advice to public authorities in general is that:

those public authorities that already have contingency plans for responding to infectious diseases, such as pandemic influenza, should ensure that all relevant staff are acquainted with those plans.

- 21 **No other action is recommended at this time to public authorities in general.**

- 22 If this advice needs to change, consideration will be given to invoking the NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA) for multi-agency coordination.

Yours sincerely

Personal Data

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Chief Medical Officer

cc The Executive Office
Health Gold
Health Silver