

FROM: Liz Redmond

DATE: 1 February 2020

TO: 1. Dr Michael McBride
2. Minister Swann

BRIEFING FOR EXECUTIVE MEETING ON 3 FEBRUARY 2020 - AoB ITEM - 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (2019-nCoV)

ISSUE: Briefing for AoB item –
novel coronavirus (2019 nCoV)

TIMING: Monday 3 February 2020

PRESENTATIONAL ISSUES The Department is working closely with the Public Health Agency on proactive localised messaging. A range of channels are being deployed including social media, websites and NI Direct. A more detailed comms plan will be deployed in the event of a confirmed case in NI. (DG 01/02/2020)

FOI IMPLICATIONS Fully disclosable

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS None at this stage.

LEGISLATION IMPLICATIONS None.

EQUALITY/HUMAN RIGHTS/RURAL NEEDS IMPLICATIONS None.

RECOMMENDATION: You are invited to note the briefing including speaking notes and lines to take (**Tab A**).

Introduction

1. The outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019 nCoV) will be discussed under AoB at the Executive meeting on Monday 3 February.

Background and Situation Update

2. You have already had several briefings both written and oral on the outbreak of coronavirus which has emanated from Wuhan in China. As of 2 February at 9:30, DHSC reported 14,545 confirmed cases worldwide, 14,390 of those are in China. There have been 305 deaths to date, 304 of these were in China and 1 was in the Phillipines. Note that updated numbers will be provided to you on the day.
3. On 30 January, the World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus as a global public health emergency of international concern. As a result, the UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the public from low to moderate. This permits governments to plan for all eventualities.
4. The first cases were confirmed in the UK on Friday 31st January, with two people testing positive in England. The patients are receiving specialist NHS care, and tried and tested infection control procedures are being used to prevent further spread of the virus.
5. Two completed tests were carried out in Northern Ireland, and were both negative. These numbers are not in the public domain. Given the relatively small numbers being tested at this time, we will continue to provide aggregated UK numbers to protect individual patient confidentiality.
6. Within NI systems are in place for a transfer to the Regional Infectious Disease Unit, Ward 7a Royal Victoria Hospital if a decision is taken to admit a patient who tests positive for coronavirus. Plans are also being drawn up to enable the patient to be transferred to a High consequence infectious diseases (HCID) Unit in England, if required.

Assisted Departure of British Nationals from Wuhan

7. The FCO repatriated British and EU Nationals from Wuhan to the UK on 31 January and they are now in supported isolation for 14 days in NHS staff

accommodation in England. Anyone with symptoms will be taken to a high-level infectious diseases unit.

8. It is understood that three Irish nationals were on board and have been placed in the same isolation facility as the British nationals. It is not known if any of the British or Irish nationals have addresses in Northern Ireland.
9. **A further 11 British nationals were repatriated on a French flight on 2 February to the supported isolation facility. Anyone who now returns from Wuhan will be safely isolated for at least 14 days with all necessary medical attention.**

Travel Advice

10. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all travel to Hubei Province due to the ongoing novel coronavirus outbreak and all but essential travel to the rest of mainland China (not including Hong Kong and Macao). The Chinese government continues to impose restrictions on movement within China in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Some airlines, including British Airways, have suspended flights to and from mainland China.
11. China has already introduced port-of-exit screening so people already exhibiting symptoms are not allowed to leave the country.
12. PHE have developed posters to be displayed in all UK airports. These have been shared with the DAs who have amended for local use, but the clinical details will be consistent across the UK. The PHA have had regular meetings with the NI Port Health Authority to ensure advice for travellers and safety.
13. The UK CMOs have now agreed that, given the potential health and social consequences of a major epidemic, it is now appropriate to plan and prepare for the reasonable worst case scenario of Influenza pandemic moderate severity, without a vaccine. DHSC recommends, and this has been agreed with the DAs, that existing Pandemic Flu guidance would be the most appropriate model to use in the event of planning for the potential impact on health and society. The devolved administrations are taking part in daily teleconferences hosted by DHSC to ensure the whole of the UK is appropriately prepared and a consistent

approach taken. The Public Health Agency continues to work with the relevant public health organisations across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The CMO has been in regular contact with his counterpart in the RoI.

14. There has been considerable national media coverage of the Coronavirus outbreak as well reporting by local media. DHSC have been holding meetings of officials from Communication teams of the four UK health Departments daily, to discuss the key messages and ensure a consistent approach is agreed across the nations.

Recommendation

15. You are invited to note the briefing including speaking notes and lines to take at Tab A. **Given how quickly the situation is changing we will provide you with updated figures for the number of confirmed cases on Monday before the meeting.**

Liz Redmond

Ext **I&S**

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SPEAKING NOTE AND LINES TO TAKE

- As you will be aware the novel Coronavirus emanating from Wuhan in China has continued to spread globally and on 30 January, the World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus as a global public health emergency of international concern.
- As a result, the UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the public from low to moderate. This permits governments to plan for all eventualities.
- We have now seen the first confirmed cases in the UK, with two people testing positive in England. The patients are receiving specialist NHS care, and tried and tested infection control procedures are being used to prevent further spread of the virus.
- To date there have been two individuals tested in NI. Tests for both were negative. Given the relatively small numbers being tested here at this time, we will continue to provide aggregated UK numbers to protect individual patient confidentiality.
- It is not unreasonable to assume that at some point we will have a positive case in Northern Ireland.
- This remains a rapidly evolving situation, with numbers of cases changing very frequently and as of 2 February at 9:30, the official data from DHSC shows 14,545 cases have been confirmed, of which 14,390 are in Mainland China. 305 people have died, one of these deaths was in the Philippines and the rest were within China.
- Any Northern Ireland residents currently in China should follow the advice of the local authorities and leave if they are able to do so.
- The FCO repatriated British and EU Nationals from Wuhan to the UK on 31 January and on 2 February and they are now in supported isolation for 14 days

in NHS staff accommodation in England. Anyone who develops symptoms will be taken to a high-level infectious diseases unit.

- I want to reassure the Executive that my Department and the Public Health Agency continue to work closely with the relevant authorities and public health organisations across the UK and the Republic of Ireland to ensure Northern Ireland is well prepared to deal with the situation as events unfold.
- The CMO and my officials have been in regular contact with their contacts in the Republic of Ireland
- My Department has issued two letters from the Chief Medical Officer providing guidance to clinical staff on what to do if they encounter patients with respiratory infections arriving from overseas.
- It has also set up an Emergency Operations Centre and has updated relevant websites with advice for members of the public.
- The PHA and HSCB have also activated their Emergency Operations Centre and continue to closely monitor the situation and risk in Northern Ireland. They are working closely with the Trusts, Port Health and primary care to make them aware of the incident and potential symptoms of the virus.
- The PHA is also working with Universities and Educational Establishments, and with the Chinese community to offer advice and support.
- We will work with our colleagues in the PHA to ensure materials are updated as nationally agreed guidance evolves.
- I shall be meeting with the Chinese Consul General in Belfast later today.
- There continues to be no room for complacency and my priority as Minister is still to ensure effective measures are in place within Northern Ireland.

Lines to take

- We are very likely to see further confirmed cases in the UK over coming days and weeks. I believe it is extremely important that we have agreed mechanisms for managing this situation, including early notification of any confirmed case and ensuring our general public remain appropriately informed and reassured to the actions being taken, as appropriate.
- I want to reassure colleagues that while the risk has been raised from low to moderate there is no cause for alarm and it does not mean we think the risk to individuals in the UK has changed at this stage, but that we should plan for all eventualities
- My Department, along with the PHA remain in regular contact with the relevant authorities across the UK and the Republic of Ireland to ensure any necessary precautions are in place in Northern Ireland in response to this situation.
- We, along with all devolved administrations, are taking part in daily teleconferences hosted by DHSC to ensure the whole of the UK is appropriately prepared and a coordinated response ensues.
- My department will continue to remain in contact with officials in the Republic of Ireland and will work closely with officials and public health colleagues here in the event of a case here.
- Our regular communication with colleagues across the UK and Republic of Ireland has been invaluable to ensuring a coordinated and consistent approach, in the challenging setting of an ever changing situation.
- A joined up approach to communications is therefore vital. We have been working closely with our PHA and communications teams throughout the 4 nations to ensure we are sending out clear, coordinated and consistent messages across the UK.