

From: Director of Population Health
Liz Redmond



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Date: 6th February 2020

Chris Stewart
Director Executive Support and
Programme for Government
The Executive Office
SD13
Stormont Castle
Stormont
BT4 3ST

Dear Chris,

Sector Resilience – Novel Coronavirus

The purpose of my letter is to highlight the need for The Executive Office (TEO) Civil Contingencies Policy Branch (CCPB) to urgently consider sector resilience in the face of a growing threat from novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). The number of cases reported worldwide is growing daily. There are still uncertainties surrounding the characteristics of the virus but it is now clear it has the potential to spread and cause economy-wide impacts, as is currently being seen in China.

The UK CMOs have 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 (RWCS) of influenza pandemic moderate severity, without a vaccine**. Existing pandemic flu guidance is therefore being used to plan for the potential impact on health and society while the Cabinet Office is currently collating information in order to devise a RWCS for the 2019-nCoV outbreak.

You will be aware that pandemic influenza remains in the highest risk category as the only non-malicious risk with the potential for catastrophic consequences for the whole of the UK, according to the Cabinet Office National Security Risk Assessment 2019. In October 2016, a major UK-wide exercise (Exercise Cygnus) was conducted, based on an outbreak which was close to the UK's reasonable worst case planning scenario. Whilst providing reassurance on UK preparedness for a mild to moderate pandemic, this exercise did identify gaps in capabilities to overcome a severe pandemic.

To address the lessons from Cygnus, a cross-government UK Pandemic Flu Preparedness Board (PFRB) was established in May 2017, jointly led by Cabinet Office and DHSC. The PFRB programme is divided into five workstreams, aimed at improving resilience in healthcare and community care, and critical sector resilience.

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This work programme is currently being taken forward through CCGNI, with DoH in the lead on health and social care, DoJ leading on excess deaths, and TEO leading on sector resilience.

DoH is responding to the rapidly evolving situation regarding the novel coronavirus as Lead Government Department and we activated Health Gold on 27th February. We are continuing to work closely with the relevant authorities and public health organisations across the UK as the outbreak in China develops, to ensure we are ready to deal with the health and social care consequences of the situation.

Given developments in China in recent days, I anticipate that the demand for information, guidance and co-ordination is highly likely to increase significantly in coming weeks. This raises issues around both sector resilience and wider strategic coordination across civil contingencies arrangements.

I do not consider it necessary to activate NICCMA arrangements at this time, unless or until the infection appears in NI and impacts are experienced here. However, the CCPB has oversight of civil contingencies arrangements in Northern Ireland and leads on the PFRB sector resilience workstream. Therefore, in order to provide reassurances should an escalation of events require a request to implement NICCMA, it would be helpful if you would consider convening a multi-agency meeting in order to inform an assessment of sector resilience preparedness, capacity and capabilities across NI departments and agencies and the emergency services.

To assist with wider government co-ordination here, the Chief Medical Officer has written a letter (Annex A) regarding health advice, to be shared with CCG leads for information and cascading to their Arm's Length Bodies. I would be grateful if you could arrange for this to be shared as soon as possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or NR (EOC Chief of Staff) if you would like to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Personal Data

Liz Redmond
Director of Population Health
Health Gold – EOC Lead

cc. Richard Pengelly
Michael McBride
Naresh Chada
Bernie Rooney

NR

Annex A – CMO letter to other government departments and ALBs with health advice, for issue to CCGNI members

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