

## **PERMANENT SECRETARIES STAKEHOLDER GROUP– FRIDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2020**

### **AIDE MEMOIRE ON Covid-19 (Coronavirus)**

The following aide memoire is provided in case you wish to raise this at PSS or if colleagues initiate discussion.

### **COVID 19 UPDATE - as at 12.30 on 20 February 2020**

- Number of confirmed Covid-19 cases globally is 75,729
- Fatalities – 2,128 - all in China apart from 3 in Japan and one each in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan and France.
- UK has 9 confirmed cases to date (eight have since been discharged).
- Based on the advice of the UK CMOs the risk to the UK currently stands at moderate. This allows Governments to plan for all eventualities.
- Scientific modelling forecasts indicate that a peak is likely to occur in China in March, and in the UK as early as April 2020.
- In addition to the UK cases there are 6 UK nationals with confirmed coronavirus in France, 1 in Spain and 8 diagnosed on board a cruise ship in Japan.
- The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has advised the UK CMOs that UK testing for Covid-19 should include those who are showing possible symptoms and have travelled from China, Thailand, Japan, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia or Macau. Posters advising of this are being displayed in all UK airports including here.
- We have a dedicated 24 hour NI helpline to provide advice for those who may have concerns following a visit to any of these countries.
- From the 10 February, 12 centres across the UK are now capable of carrying out tests for Covid-19. This includes a facility in Northern Ireland at the Belfast RVL.
- In NI, as of 20 February, 45 tests have now been carried out none of which have been positive. PHA releases a weekly update on the number of tests completed here.
- The current protocol for a first case in each UK country is to transfer to a HICD unit in England. While patient transfer is awaited, any confirmed case, i.e. presumptive diagnosis based on Belfast RVL test result, the patient will be

admitted to the Regional Infectious Disease Unit, ward 7A Belfast RVH if 16 years and over or RBHSC if the patient is under age 16.

- There are 78 UK nationals on board the Diamond Princess Cruise Ship docked in Yokohama, Japan. A flight is planned for later this week to repatriate British nationals where they will then be placed in supported isolation for 14 days.

## **SECTOR RESILIENCE and REASONABLE WORST CASE SCENARIO PLANNING**

- Cabinet Office is currently working to the 2019 National Security Risk Assessment pandemic flu planning assumption as the Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS).
- This assumes that the first wave of the pandemic will last approximately 15 weeks with over 50% of the population falling ill and up to 20% off work during the peak weeks. This would lead to a huge surge in demand for health and social care services which would have a knock-on impact on current provision.
- Urgent consideration is needed across Departments on sector resilience in the face of a growing threat from COVID-19. The number of cases reported worldwide is still growing daily, with the potential to spread and cause economy-wide impacts, as is currently being seen in China.
- 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.
- It is not necessary to activate NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA) at this time; however, this is an evolving situation and preparedness across NI is critical.
- Departments will need to review business continuity arrangements to assess resilience preparedness, capacity and capabilities, including likely impact on the delivery of essential services.
- TEO convened a multi-agency meeting through the Civil Contingencies Group to assess sector resilience on Thursday 20 February. DoH and PHA were in attendance. I understand TEO now take part in the weekly COBR officials meetings.

## THE HEALTH PROTECTION (CORONAVIRUS) REGULATIONS 2020 AND CORONAVIRUS BILL

- DHSC announced the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 on 10 February. The Regulations are designed to provide a range of measures to prevent the further transmission of COVID-19, including powers to detain an individual on public health grounds for the purposes of isolation and screening. These powers will apply to England only.
- The primary public health legislation in NI is the Public Health Act (Northern Ireland) 1967. 

	LPP/LAP
LPP/LAP	Equivalent primary legislation

would not be taken through the Assembly in as quick a time as using the UK-wide Coronavirus Bill, even if the accelerated passage procedure were to be invoked. Therefore the draft Coronavirus Bill will be the most suitable vehicle for creating powers in primary legislation for the NI Assembly to make emergency regulations equivalent to the Regulations for England.
- Officials are working with colleagues in the NI Office of the Legislative Counsel to develop a clause pertaining to the above requirement to be included in the draft Coronavirus Bill.
- Working closely with the Cabinet Office, policy leads in DoH have assessed existing legislation against the proposed UK-wide draft Coronavirus Bill and have drafted five additional NI clauses where existing additional legislative powers or flexibilities are required to ensure NI preparedness in the event of a pandemic. At the Executive meeting on 17 February Minister Swann gained Executive agreement to consent to Westminster legislating on our behalf, by way of the Coronavirus Bill.
- The Bill will be brought forward on a time-limited basis. The powers being sought are proportionate to the challenges we will face in responding to a severe pandemic and will only be enacted for the duration of any pandemic after which the legislation would be withdrawn by way of a 'sunset' clause. The exception to this may be the emergency public health powers, including regulation-making powers for isolation. We have asked Cabinet Office to

consider not applying a sunset clause to these provisions as these powers are currently not available under any other NI legislation but are available to the other UK countries.

- As regards cross-border differences, in ROI the equivalent legislation for holding patients in isolation is the [Irish Health Act 1947 – S38](#). It makes provision for detention, but only for named diseases. Primary legislation could be amended.