

**OFFICIAL SENSITIVE**

**BERNIE ROONEY  
DIRECTOR**

**I&S**

Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
BELFAST  
BT4 3SR

Tel:

**I&S**

[Bernie.Rooney@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Bernie.Rooney@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)

**cc Distribution list attached**

**FROM: BERNIE ROONEY  
TEO**

**DATE: 30 JANUARY 2020**

**TO: PS/FIRST MINISTER  
PS/DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

**SUBJECT: UPDATE: COBRA MEETING, 29 January 2020,  
RE : CORONAVIROUS – UK PREPAREDNESS**

**Issue:** To provide an update from the COBR MEETING, Coronavirus – UK Preparedness, of 29 January 2020, including agreed actions and decisions.

Minister for Health, Minister Swann participated in the meeting and was supported by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Health officials.

Next meeting is an - Ad hoc officials meeting is scheduled to take place on Friday 31 January at 11.30 am.

Minister Swan will provide an oral update at the next Executive meeting.

**Timescale:** Immediate.

**Press Office Advice:** COBR are leading communications on a UK wide basis.

## Background

1. The Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock chaired a COBR meeting on Wednesday 29 January at 4.30pm to discuss coronavirus and consider UK preparedness. Devolved Administrations were invited to participate and the Minister for Health, Minister Swann was in attendance the meeting.

2. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is scheduled to meet today and is likely to increase the level of risk and advise that this may and could become a pandemic. ~~The term pandemic reflects a situation where there is global spread. It is not a reflection of severity of illness. If WHO increase the global risk level to high the collective advice of the four UK CMOs to COBR is to raise the level of risk in the UK to 'Moderate'. In practical terms this makes little or no difference to the risk to individuals in the UK but reflects the need for governments to, to increase the level of planning and preparedness.~~

Deleted:

Deleted: intend

Deleted:

Deleted: rather reflects the increase in spread of the virus. Health officials will continue

Deleted: undertake the same precautionary measure and levels of

## Detail

3. The Department for Health in Northern Ireland, as the lead government department are closely monitoring the rapidly evolving situation. The Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock chaired the COBRA meeting.

A key point to note is that FCO are currently actively involved in detailed negotiations with authorities in China regarding policy matters and logistics. A number of issues are still under negotiations, and remain unresolved, for example; flight departure details and clarification on what passengers would or would not be permitted to travel. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to the Chinese FM to press for China to allow dual nationals and dependents to depart via the evacuation flight, should the wish to do so.

## Current situation update

4. The Chief Medical Officer for England, following consultation with the Chief Medical Officers ~~rs~~ across the four nations, provided an overview of the clinical situation highlighting the following:

Deleted: e

- Explanation of the nature of Coronavirus and current modelling on how it is spreading throughout China and globally.
- The clinical effects of the virus which range from asymptomatic to a relatively mild illness through to pneumonia.
- At risk groups which are currently thought to be older people and those with an underlying illness.
- The likelihood that a positive case will be detected at some point in the UK.
- The need for the NHS to look at existing plans as a model for preparedness which includes well developed plans for Pandemic Influenza.