

Knowledge and Analytical Services briefing on social and economic differences between Wales and rest of UK relevant to decisions on isolation – measure 3

7th March 2020

Context for social isolation - demography and household composition

Wales has an older population than the other countries in the UK. The 2018 mid year estimates show that 20.8% of the population is aged over 65 in Wales compared to 18.3% in the UK

Wales has a higher percentage of the population across all older age groups:

Population distribution, 2018 (% of all ages)			
	Over 65	Over 75	Over 85
UK	18.3%	8.3%	2.4%
England	18.2%	8.3%	2.4%
Wales	20.8%	9.3%	2.6%
Scotland	18.9%	8.4%	2.3%
Northern Ireland	16.4%	7.4%	2.0%
Source: Mid year estimates, ONS			

In 2018 there were around 195,000 single person households with someone aged 65 or over, and a further 360,000 people aged 65 or over live in 2 person households (not all of those contain just people aged 65 or over).

The 2011 census shows that whilst Wales has a higher proportion of households with only those aged 65 or over in them, their structure is similar to the rest of the UK (eg around 60% of such households are single person households).

Relative rates of flu vaccination

If eligibility for flu vaccination is a potential criteria for identifying the most vulnerable for social distancing, we can consider current flu vaccination uptake.

Information from Public Health England suggests that the group aged under 65 at clinical risk is proportionally higher in Wales than in England (15.4% of the population aged under 65 in Wales, compared to 14.9% in England). Source: Public Health England

The most recent report from Public Health Wales on flu vaccination uptake shows that At the end of week 09 (week ending 1st March 2020), uptake of influenza vaccine was: 69.2% in those aged 65 years and older, 43.9% in patients aged six months to 64 years at clinical risk, and 50.0% in children aged two and three years old. In the 1,331 primary schools visited thus far as part of the universal childhood

influenza programme, uptake was 68.7%. (source: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/page.cfm?orgid=457&pid=34338>).

Implications

Labour Market

There will be a potential impact on the labour market of social distancing amongst the elderly and vulnerable. Without understanding the criteria for identifying those that are vulnerable, but not elderly, it is impossible to understand the full impact (hypothesis: might those at clinical risk but under 65 be more likely to be economically inactive than their peers?)

In terms of the elderly 64,000 over 65s are in work, but the rate is a little lower than the UK. <https://statswales.gov.wales/v/HYVJ>

Care homes

Social distancing will have a significant impact on the care home sector in Wales. In 2018 there were 22,500 older person care home places in registered settings in Wales. (source: CIW)

Third sector and carers

If social distancing measures are put in place for the elderly and vulnerable, this will lead to an increased reliance on carers and the voluntary sector to provide essential services in the home. If those carers are themselves elderly or vulnerable, this will exacerbate the potential impact.

Wales has a higher rate of people providing unpaid care across all age groups. Around 15% of those over 65 provide some unpaid care to another – that is higher than the figure in England.

	Under 16	16 To 64	Over 65	All Ages
Wales	1.4%	14.2%	15.5%	12.1%
England	1.1%	12.0%	13.8%	10.2%
			<i>Source: 2011 census</i>	

Furthermore 24 per cent of unpaid carers in Wales are aged 65 or over, compared with 22 per cent in England.

According to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in 2017 just under 100,000 were employed by the voluntary sector in Wales. An age breakdown of that number is not immediately available.

The National Survey for Wales shows that 35 per cent of those aged 65 -74 volunteer, as do 27 per cent of those aged 75 or over (compared with around 9 per cent who are in employment). Therefore if those aged 65 and over are socially distanced, this will impact significantly on the third sector.

Sources:

https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/LC3301EW/view/2092957699?rows=c_carer&cols=c_age

<https://wcva.cymru/the-voluntary-sector-in-wales/>

% of 65+ in employment calculated from StatsWales

Digital and 4G access

Under any isolation measures or social distancing the provision of high quality broadband will support a better quality of access to essential services including shopping. Wales' older population combined with less access to high quality internet and 4G coverage mean therefore social distancing will have a bigger impact in terms of access to services and shopping for parts of the population.

Only 79 per cent of 65-74 year olds, and 49 per cent of 75+ year olds reported that they used the internet. In 2018, of those aged 65 or over, only 57 per cent had bought goods or services online.

In September 2019, Wales was broadly in line with the rest of the UK in terms of access to a superfast broadband speed, with an access rate of 93 per cent of premises (homes and businesses), compared to 94 per cent across the UK. However, Wales had the lowest take-up in any of the UK nations, with 38 per cent of Welsh premises using these services.

Welsh homes and businesses were less able than the rest of the UK to access ultrafast fixed broadband speed. 31 per cent of Welsh homes and businesses were able to access ultrafast, lower than the UK rate of 52 per cent.

There is a wide variation in access across Wales: average download speeds ranged from 31.5 Mbit/s in both Mid Wales regions, Powys and Ceredigion to 76.1 Mbit/s in Cardiff.

Mobile phone coverage from all four network operators remains lower than the UK figure. Ofcom data shows that 72 per cent of indoor premises (homes and businesses) in Wales had 4G coverage from all four operators in September 2019, compared to 80 per cent across the UK.

Sources: National survey for Wales and Connected Nations Report, the Office of Communications