

Message

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Sent: 26/11/2020 14:45:14
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Subject: yesterday's Ministerial call - summary note
Attachments: Projection - xmas impact & no occ benefit.pptx

Frank/Andrew/Rob

Could I ask you please to check this draft summary of your updates in yesterday evening's meeting. In particular can you clarify the calculation of 1600 excess deaths – see highlight below?

Many thanks

Carys

Draft note of Ministerial call 25 November

FM said that the purpose of the meeting was to receive updates on the public health and NHS position, ahead of the decisions Cabinet will need to take tomorrow afternoon. The Ministerial call tomorrow morning will receive further updates on the Tiers system in England and Scotland, the legal framework and business support options.

The objective is to ensure that everyone has time to reflect on the key contextual information, ahead of the Cabinet decisions.

Public health update

CMO made the following points:

- the firebreak succeeded in reducing the incidence of coronavirus (from around 260 per 100k going in to around 186 now)
- but rates now increasing again, with all LHB areas except BCUHB and Powys, moving in the wrong direction
- incidence in over 60s not as high as under 25s (over 60s generally more cautious), but increased cases in younger people will eventually transmit to older contacts
- mass testing pilot in Merthyr was going well, but too early to see impact on transmission.

Overall the trend is increasing and the situation is fragile. The 4 nations agreement on a measure of relaxation over Christmas will increase transmission, so we need to consider whether there is more we can do to suppress transmission before then. We hope that the new comms campaign will influence behaviour but too early to see this.

Ministers asked what was driving increased transmission- were particular groups or settings responsible? CMO said that it was not possible to attribute to any one group, examples of risky behaviour in all age groups. Universities had made an impressive effort with students.

Rob Orford said that where the virus is dispersed across communities, it will inevitably find its way into prisons, hospitals, care homes and schools. The overall picture is high prevalence, the firebreak brought R down to 0.75 but now around 1.4. People are most infectious 2 days before and after becoming symptomatic - social distancing and quarantining remain the best defence. Wherever people mix, transmission will happen. Risk that prevalence will double over Christmas so need to emphasise cautious message. SAGE analysis last Friday demonstrates positive impact from Tier 3 restrictions. Compliance seems to wane over time, so short sharp interventions most effective.

NHS capacity

Andrew Goodall reported that the NHS is managing the current pressures from a different position than in the spring. It is managing much higher numbers of patients because it is dealing with covid at the same time as workign to restore normal levels of activity, with twice as many patients in non-covid beds compared with the April peak. The slides circulated (attached) demonstrate three potential trajectories:

- slide 1: illustrates the positive impact of the firebreak leading to a reduction in admissions, with 1115 covid patients in hospital on Christmas day ie back to pre-firebreak levels but below the April peak
- slide 2: illustrates the same path up to Christmas and a potential rapid increase in bed occupancy from January due to mixing over Christmas
- slide 3: illustrates the trajectory if the firebreak does not reduce admissions as expected, with occupancy on Christmas day at 1440, ie exceeding the April peak.

By January, with the impact of Christmas mixing, we could see community prevalence at over 500 per 100k, and numbers of covid-related cases in hospital between 1500-2500.

By adjusting activity, bringing field hospitals back on stream, and other measures, the NHS would not be overwhelmed at this level but the stress on staff would be extreme. With these numbers of people seriously ill from covid, the numbers of deaths would increase, with potentially 1600 additional avoidable deaths, compared with XXXX.

Plans are in place to deploy the new vaccines as soon as regulatory approval is secured, but this will not happen soon enough to make an impact on this trajectory. Seasonal flu was virtually non existent, reflecting the experience in other countries, with the covid mitigation measures seeming to suppress flu transmission.

Schools

The Education Minister updated on discussions about school closures in Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire and planning for the Christmas break, including TTP data requirements – the objective was to achieve a consistent all-Wales approach. She will update further following discussions with the head teacher unions.

Conclusion

Summing up, FM noted that Wales currently has the most liberal regime of the UK and incidence is rising. The briefing has underlined the impact of rising cases not just on NHS capacity but also on the numbers of avoidable deaths.

Carys Evans

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Ysgrifennwch ataf yn Gymraeg neu'n Saesneg