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MEMORANDUM E (20) 168 (C)

FROM: Robin Swann MLA
MINISTER FOR HEALTH

DATE: 9 July 2020

TO: EXECUTIVE COLLEAGUES

FINAL EXECUTIVE PAPER: FIRST REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL REGULATIONS (NI)

1. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 came into operation on 8 June. Their first review was completed on 29 June and the Executive agreed the regulations were still required (EXEC-0455-2020). The Executive is asked to agree that that amendments will be made to the Regulations to include:
 - a. additional exemptions from the requirement to provide information,
 - b. additional sectoral exemptions from self-isolation, and
 - c. exemptions from the self-isolation requirement for travellers from low and medium risk countries.

AMENDMENTS PROPOSED TO THE REGULATIONS

2. I am proposing to amend the information provision requirement to provide exemptions for transport workers in non-passenger facing roles. They cross the border multiple times per day and since they don't come into contact with passengers, contact tracing would not be required for them in the event of an outbreak. I will also exempt MOD vessels and aircraft which have not docked or taken on persons outside of the CTA; and members of visiting forces on a ship with UK armed forces where the ship has been at sea for 14 days or more and hasn't taken on any persons or docked outside the CTA. Both exemptions involved around 10-20 arrivals per day into the UK. These exemptions will be in line with the other UK regions.
3. I am proposing to include the following exemptions from the self-isolation requirement in line with other UK regions:

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- a. Beach nourishment project workers – for emergency works or contractual obligations for flood & coastal erosion risk management
 - b. Waste management specialist workers – construction or installation or waste management facilities
 - c. Government contractors – require to travel to support continuing function of overseas essential work (e.g. national security or COVID response)
 - d. Human cell couriers – technical change only
 - e. MOD vessels and aircraft and MOD visiting forces as described above.
 - f. Offshore workers – amendment to existing exemption to limit to those required to undertake specified work in the next 14 days and correct a reference to the Petroleum Act
 - g. Athletes travelling for Elite Sporting events – on the condition that PHE confirm mitigating health measures, including bubbles for returning sportspeople and personnel.
 - h. Film and TV production – also with mitigating conditions in place regarding bubbles for cast and crew, and regular testing measures.
4. I am proposing to make one further change which would be specific to Northern Ireland. This would amend the Healthcare worker (HCWs) exemption. Given the high risk health care workers would pose by the nature of their work, I proposed to limit this exemption to persons who have travelled to NI specifically in order to provide healthcare. Scotland do not included this exemption and Wales are removing it in their amendment this week.
5. These amendments would be made as soon as possible and come into operation on or before Monday 12 July.

COUNTRY EXEMPTIONS

6. Colleagues will be aware of UKG plans to exempt travellers from certain countries following analysis of prevalence rates abroad, and taking into account PHE's risk assessment.

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7. I have taken advice from my Chief Scientific Officer and Chief Medical Officer. These views are based purely on risk to virus transmission and propagation of the epidemic, as follows:
 8.
 - A. The absolute risk of importing COVID-19 cases to NI depends both on the prevalence in NI and the other country and the number of individuals arriving in NI from the country concerned. Even within the UK there is significant regional variation (specifically in England and Wales) and average prevalence / incidence is currently greater than NI at this time.
 - B. Travellers from any country with a prevalence higher than NI using the UKG methodology will have somewhat increased risk of being infected.
 - C. There are likely to be more travellers to NI from the rest of the UK than any of the countries listed
 - D. With regard to introducing the epidemic into NI without accurate data on the likely number of travellers to NI from specific countries including the rest of the UK it is not possible to estimate the public health benefit of imposing restrictions on travellers as this depends both on prevalence and numbers of travellers. Without accurate data it is not possible to accurately estimate the relative and absolute risk.
 - E. Incidence and prevalence changes constantly in all countries, so this approach would need to be revisited regularly.
9. Scotland has reviewed their position and will proceed with exemption from self-isolation for Amber countries but will not include Spain and Serbia. Wales have not confirmed their position but are likely to mirror England and exempt both low and medium risk countries.
10. Currently ROI only require travellers, including those arriving into ports from GB, to complete a passenger locator form on arrival. No final decisions on mandatory isolation arrangements has been taken there.
11. The EU has published a list of 15 third countries which it recommends Member States to ease restrictions for from 1 July. This is the first step in a phased reduction in the restrictions on non-essential travel from outside the EU.

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12. Following consideration and discussion with CDL Michael Gove and Ministers in the devolved administrations, I propose that Northern Ireland introduces exemptions for travellers from low and medium risk countries.
13. I intend to consider a testing strategy to inform future exemption decisions. This will provide the Executive an opportunity to further consider the relative and absolute risk associated with further exemptions and the effectiveness of a testing approach for travellers into NI. In addition I will be actively exploring mechanisms to rapidly remove exemptions in the event of regional or national outbreaks in any of the exempted countries.
14. Through the test, trace and protect programme active monitoring of this policy will take place, and if it were to be found that the number of imported cases was creating a risk for the community here, amendments would be proposed to the exemptions in place.

THE HEALTH PROTECTION (CORONAVIRUS, PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION FOR PASSENGERS TRAVELLING TO NORTHERN IRELAND) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2020

15. The above regulations place a legal requirement on transport operators bringing passengers into Northern Ireland from outside of the Common Travel Area to provide information on the legal requirements of the International Travel Regulations. This must be provided in advance of booking, on check-in and during the journey to Northern Ireland.
16. The Regulations are required to be reviewed every 21 days, with the first review due by 29 June. Whilst this date has passed, the agreement on the continued need for the International Travel Regulations provides the rationale for the continued need for these Regulation to ensure passengers are aware of their obligations.

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17. Given the Executive has agreed the International Travel Regulations are still required, it is my view these Regulations are also required to ensure passengers are aware of their obligations.

RECOMMENDATION

18. The Executive is invited to agree that amendments are made to the Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, to allow for:
- a. additional exemptions from the requirement to provide information outlined in paragraph 2,
 - b. additional sectoral exemptions from self-isolation outlined in paragraphs 3-4, and
 - c. exemptions from the self-isolation requirement for travellers from low and medium risk countries outlined in paragraphs 6-12.
19. The Executive is invited to agree that the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Information for Passengers Travelling to Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 are still required.

**Robin Swann MLA
MINISTER FOR HEALTH**

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