

NI COVID 19 Modelling Group Conference Call – 30 September 2020

Attendees

Ian Young DoH (Chairperson)
Paul McWilliams SIB
Janice Bailie PHA
Declan Bradley PHA
Adele Marshall QUB
Frank Kee QUB
Paul Montgomery DoH

Key issues discussed

Update

- Ian provided an update on the latest position in respect of the key indicators of the virus. The 7 day rolling average for new Covid-19 cases per day has risen to around 250 (145 previous week). The number of tests has stabilised with the increase in case numbers reflecting the proportion of tests identifying the presence of Covid-19 which has risen from 2 to 5% in recent weeks. There are some parts of the UK where the rate is now in double figures.
- The latest estimate of the R number for both cases and inpatients is between 1.2 and 1.6. It was agreed that this range should be reported to the Executive.
- The increase in cases continues to be reflected in rising numbers of hospital admissions and in-patient numbers. Ian referred to the experience of Wave 1 to highlight how quickly this could result in capacity being breached. The current doubling time of around 9 days would suggest that the Wave 1 level of hospital demand from Covid-19 patients could be reached in 2-3 weeks.
- Ian highlighted the very high number of cases in the Derry City and Strabane Local Government District (LGD) as well as the increases in Mid Ulster. There was limited information available in respect of the cause of the increases in case numbers in certain LGDs but not others, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that it may be due to community events. Although the localised restrictions in Belfast and Ballymena have reduced the rate of growth in these area, the impact has been less in urban than rural areas.
- There was a discussion about the scale and form of intervention required to reduce the number of cases. Declan Bradley highlighted that an earlier comprehensive intervention would be of shorter duration than if there was a delay in implementing the required actions. Paul McWilliams referred to the economic impact on those who had not previously received government support and the falling public acceptance of social distancing measures.

- Ian referred to the NI Executive commitment to keep the R number below 1 and the previous SAGE advice that this could only be achieved by robust TTP arrangements with either the hospitality sector or education sector remaining closed.
- Ian suggested that one option in the first instance would be to have localised restrictions for the Derry City and Strabane LGD involving potentially, the hospitality sector, personal services and non-essential retail, supported by restrictions on travel outside of the area. In addition, the advice for other parts of NI could be reinforced.

AOB