

CDL-FMs Weekly Call
Wednesday 27 January 2021

AGENDA

This meeting, as well as covering any remaining issue on hotel quarantine, will cover non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) between nations and compliance.

STEER

There are no particular points to raise around either of the items on the agenda.

On NPIs it will be of particular interest to assess the position of FM/dFM on schools returning and the 18 February lockdown review, ahead of discussion on this issue at tomorrow's executive, and following the PMs announcement on schools not reopening in England until March today.

On compliance, we expect that, following a similar discussion among officials, the C-19 Secretariat will present a more nuanced understanding of compliance and highlight that:

- a) UKG must encourage minimisation of social contact within the rules
- b) Not all non-compliance is equal and measuring incidents of noncompliance can present an overly negative picture, e.g. some people who are self-isolating might go to parties whereas some might walk their dog at night

If engagement on hotel quarantines is raised, you should note the trilateral officials meeting which took place this afternoon and flag that NIO will continue to facilitate discussions on messaging and implementation of similar policies in Ireland and England - and possibly Northern Ireland.

LINES TO TAKE

[If hotel quarantine raised]

- I am keen to facilitate further discussions between Northern Ireland, UK Government and Ireland on this issue and I am pleased that an official level trilat has taken place today ahead of a ministerial quad next week.
- There is an opportunity to have joined up messaging across the UK and Ireland on the strong steps being taken to prevent new and potentially dangerous strains of Covid-19 spreading in the UK.

BACKGROUND

Compliance

Estimates based on travel data (google and apple maps) show that UK mobility is currently between the exceptionally low levels seen in March 2020 and the levels seen in November lockdowns. This does not necessarily reflect an decrease in compliance, but could also be explained by the increased opportunities to legally leave your house, to bubble with other houses and to meet with a single person to exercise outside.

NPIs

Lockdown measures: The UK and Ireland are in hard lockdowns at the moment. Ireland extending their measures means that NI and Ireland will both now come out of recent measures on 5 March. NI will have a review on 18 February.

Schools: The Prime Minister has announced that schools in England will not reopen until at least early March. This will be discussed in the Executive tomorrow and there is no firm decision in place for NI.

Current Covid-19 Situation in Northern Ireland

Cases have fallen consistently to around 250 per 100,000 over the past 7 days from above 600 at the start of the year. This is not yet reflected by pressure on hospitals and military assistance is due to come in later this week.

Vaccinations are progressing well with 125,717 first doses having been given. There has been a slight slowing in the rate of vaccinations as NI prepares to move from Phase 1 of the JCVI priority groups to Phase 2. Northern Ireland and England now have very similar percentages of the adult population having received vaccinations and it would be worth emphasizing the achievement of vaccinating JCVI group 1 in such short time.

Hotel Quarantines

How do recent developments intersect with data-sharing issues?

Recent developments have potentially significantly improved the data-sharing issue.

- The Taoiseach said work to implement quarantine measures would begin immediately, that they would apply to anyone coming to the island, and that policing of the regulations would be increased significantly, with travel plans collaborated on by NI/IE/UKG.
- Eamon Ryan said Ireland would adjust the passenger locator regulations to require incoming passengers, including those going on to NI, to provide place of residence and address on the form, and that arrangements with NI would be concluded on data sharing and follow-up with passengers who travel via Ireland to NI.

UK Position:

Ministers agreed last night to:

- Increase checks/enforcement of the current quarantine system;
- Be much clearer that people should not be leaving home for any non-essential or leisure travel. As part of this stronger police presence at airports. (DfT and HO work here but I assume an FCDO element too)
- Tightening list of exemptions (ie list of those exempt from travel/quarantine restrictions)
- Implementing hotel quarantine for people travelling from red list countries - whilst noting that this would take a few weeks to stand up. Quarantine would be for 10 days.
- This would only apply to UK citizens returning as most other travel is banned from red-list countries.

Irish Position:

- The Cabinet yesterday agreed to introduce a range of measures to increase compliance, including a range of mandatory quarantine measures.
- Mandatory quarantine 'at a designated facility' will be required for passengers from South Africa and Brazil; and for those who arrive without a pre-departure negative test result. In other cases, passengers will be required by law to quarantine at home.
- Current travel regulations for overseas arrivals to Ireland will also apply to those who arrive via Northern Ireland.
- The Irish Government also announced an extension to Level 5 restrictions until 5 March, under which non-essential international travel is not permitted.