

NI COVID 19 Modelling Group Conference Call – 13 October 2020

Attendees

Ian Young DoH (Chairperson)
Paul McWilliams SIB
Janice Bailie PHA
Declan Bradley PHA
Adele Marshall 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 has risen to 700 and has more than doubled over the past week. Although there has been a slight reduction in the number of cases in recent days, this is due to a fall in the number of tests with the proportion of tests identifying the presence of Covid-19 continuing to rise to almost 12%- some Local Government Districts (LGDs) have rates of 25%. The number of cases in Northern Ireland is significantly higher than in the rest of the UK and in the Republic of Ireland.
- The latest estimate of the R number for cases is between 1.4 and 1.8. It was agreed that this range should be reported to the Executive.
- Ian highlighted that the number of cases in the Derry City and Strabane LGD remained very high and was expected to breach 1,000 per 100,000 population. However, the growth in the number of cases in the Newry, Mourne and Down LGD was much lower. The number of cases per 100,000 in every LGD in NI was higher than the trigger point (80) for the previous localised interventions which implied that any intervention should be at the NI level.
- The increase in cases continues to be reflected in rising numbers of hospital admissions and in-patient numbers. The number of hospital in-patients with Covid-19 is currently (c145) around half the level of the Wave 1 peak (290) and is doubling every 8 Days. It would be expected that the Wave 2 peak for hospital in-patients will be around double the Wave 1 peak depending on the actions taken by the NI Executive. ICU Occupancy would be expected to be around the Wave 1 peak (55) if action is taken to reduce the R number to below 1 by the end of the week.
- In terms of the response, Ian referred to the need for the R number to be below 1 to reduce the course of the epidemic with the Wave 1 lockdown reducing R to approximately 0.7 compared with the current value of around 1.6. Although it is difficult to measure the impact of individual interventions on R, it is estimated (John Edmunds) that the impact of schools opening was to increase R by 0.2.

- Ian presented the outcomes from a number of scenarios that had been developed by Paul McWilliams. These were based on the NI Executive introducing sufficient measures to reduce the R number to 0.7/0.9 from 16 October for 3-6 weeks followed by a relaxation of measures resulting in an increase in the R number to 1.3/1.4. Under each of the scenarios, Covid-19 related hospital admissions would continue rising to a peak of 450-500 (compared with 290 in Wave 1) and then fall. Declan Bradley suggested that it would take longer than set out in the scenarios for the numbers to fall due to increased lengths of stay for some patients.
- The number of cases and hospital admission would then start to rise again shortly after, with the potential need for a further intervention before Christmas or shortly after, depending on the extent and duration of the actions taken now. However, this would allow time for enhanced contact tracing arrangements to be put in place.
- Adele Marshall referred to the assessment of alert levels being undertaken at UK level and suggested that this might be replicated for NI.

AOB

- Janice Bailie advised the group that the ONS Covid Infection Survey was continuing to report results for NI on a weekly basis, but that the figures were low with wide confidence intervals.
- Paul Montgomery requested that he be provided with the final findings from the Adult Contact Survey and the subsequent Children's Contact Survey. The group agreed the importance of continuing to conduct these surveys to measure the impact of the measures taken by the NI Executive to control the spread of the virus.