

FROM: Gerard Collins

DATE: 7 February 2020

TO: 1. Dr Michael McBride
2. Minister Swann

**BRIEFING FOR EXECUTIVE MEETING ON 10 FEBRUARY 2020 - AoB ITEM -
2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (2019-nCoV)**

ISSUE: Briefing for AoB item –
novel coronavirus (2019 nCoV)

TIMING: Monday 10 February 2020

PRESENTATIONAL ISSUES Media interest in this issue remains high. PHA
are leading as regards media enquiries but
Press Office will continue to monitor the
situation closely. Cleared with Press Office
7/2/20 (PC)

FOI IMPLICATIONS Fully disclosable

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS None at this stage.

LEGISLATION IMPLICATIONS None.

**EQUALITY/HUMAN
RIGHTS/RURAL NEEDS
IMPLICATIONS** None.

RECOMMENDATION: You are invited to note the briefing including
speaking notes and lines to take (**Tab A**).

Introduction

1. The outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019 nCoV) will be discussed under AoB at the Executive meeting on Monday 10 February.

Situation Update

2. Further to previous submissions, as of 9 February at 12:30, DHSC has reported 37,567 confirmed cases of 2019 nCoV worldwide, 37,198 of these are in China. There have been 813 deaths to date, 811 of these were in China, 1 was in the Phillipines and 1 was in Hong Kong. On 30 January, the World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus as a global public health emergency of international concern. As a result, the UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the public from low to moderate.
3. In the UK, as of 9 February, four people have now tested positive for 2019-nCoV, all of which have been in England. The two most recent individuals that tested positive for coronavirus are not believed to have acquired this in the UK or China. It is anticipated there may be further confirmed cases linked to the third and fourth case with further announcements in England today (10 Feb). All the patients have been transferred to specialist NHS centres, and robust infection control measures are being used to prevent any possible further spread of the virus. PHE is undertaking urgent contact tracing.
4. In addition to the UK cases there are also 5 UK nationals with confirmed coronavirus in France, one in Spain and one on board a cruise ship off the coast of Japan.
5. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has advised the UK CMOs that UK testing for novel coronavirus should be widened (from mainland China) to also include individuals in the UK, who are showing possible symptoms of novel coronavirus and have travelled from Thailand, Japan, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia or Macau. There has been some media coverage in the RoI that this differs to the approach there at present.

6. A letter from the Chief Medical Officer alerting the HSC system to this development was issued on 7 February.
7. In Northern Ireland, as of 9 February, 16 tests have been carried out, 12 of these were negative while results are awaited for the remaining four. These numbers are not in the public domain. Given the relatively small numbers being tested at this time, we will continue to provide aggregated UK numbers to protect individual patient confidentiality.
8. From Monday, 10 February there will be 12 centres across the UK capable of carrying out tests. This will include a facility in Northern Ireland.
9. Within NI systems are in place for a transfer to the Regional Infectious Disease Unit, Ward 7a Royal Victoria Hospital if a decision is taken to admit a patient who tests positive for coronavirus. Plans are also being drawn up to enable a patient to be transferred to a High consequence infectious diseases (HCID) Unit in England, if required.
10. The devolved administrations are continuing to take part in daily teleconferences, 7 days a week, hosted by DHSC to ensure the whole of the UK is appropriately prepared and a consistent approach taken. DHSC are also continuing to hold meetings of officials from Communication teams of the four UK health Departments daily, to ensure a consistent approach is agreed across the nations.
11. The Public Health Agency continues to work with the relevant public health organisations across the UK and the Republic of Ireland while CMO has been in regular contact with his counterpart in the RoI.

REASONABLE WORST CASE SCENARIO PLANING

12. As agreed at the COBR meeting on 5 February.
 - **ALL DEPARTMENTS** to rapidly advance planning for reasonable worst case scenario, centrally coordinated by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat.

- **ALL DEPARTMENTS** to include trusted partners in Critical National Infrastructure in reasonable worst case scenario planning, in line with the agreed Cabinet Office communications plan.
13. In response to this a letter was sent to TEO on the 6 February updating them on the position with novel coronavirus and suggesting that, while the NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements for multi-agency coordination are not yet needed, they might want to consider convening a multi-agency meeting through the Civil Contingencies Group to assess sector resilience. TEO were also invited to take part in a COBR officials meeting at which resilience leads in other administrations generally attend on the 7 February.
 14. A letter from CMO providing health advice to other Departments and Agencies was issued on 6 February.

Assisted Departure of British Nationals from Wuhan

15. The FCO have repatriated 90 British and 3 Irish Nationals from Wuhan and they are now in supported isolation in NHS staff accommodation at Arrowe Park, England. PHE are enquiring what the home country would be for all those currently at the facility to arrange onward transportation once their period of isolation has ended. Based on media reports there is at least one man originally from NI at the facility.
16. A further 105 British Nationals and dependants in Hubei province were on board a second UK flight that returned to the UK from Wuhan on 9 February. We understand that 7 Irish Nationals may also be on this flight. They are expected to be treated the same as the British Nationals and will be supported in isolation at a site near Milton Keynes.
17. We understand that DHSC will be announcing early today (10 Feb) the Health Protection Regulations (Coronavirus) 2020. It is designed to provide powers to detain an individual on public health grounds (while it remains an effective intervention) for the purposes of isolation and screening. This will take the form of an amendment to part 2a of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984. These powers will apply to England only. Scotland believe they have similar powers in their 2008 Public Health Act. There are no such powers under the

Public Health Act (Northern Ireland) 1967. DHSC England have agreed to share the legislation and we will explore the potential public health benefits of such powers and possible legislative vehicles.

Travel Advice

18. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all travel to Hubei Province due to the ongoing novel coronavirus outbreak and all but essential travel to the rest of mainland China (not including Hong Kong and Macao). The Chinese government continues to impose restrictions on movement within China in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Some airlines, including British Airways, have suspended flights to and from mainland China.
19. It was agreed at the COBR meeting on 5 February not to impose further travel restrictions. This decision will be kept under review.
20. PHE have developed posters that are displayed in all UK airports and some ports and train stations. These have been amended for local use here. The PHA are also continuing to hold regular meetings with the NI Port Health Authority.

Recommendation

21. You are invited to note the briefing including speaking notes and lines to take at **Tab A**.

Gerard Collins

Ext Irrelevant & Sensitive

Copied to:

Richard Pengelly
Michael McBride
Charlotte McArdle
Naresh Chada
David Gordon
Gillian Armstrong

Name Redacted

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Gerard Collins

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NR

Press Office

PHD Admin

SPEAKING NOTE AND LINES TO TAKE

- As you will be aware the novel Coronavirus emanating from Wuhan in China has continued to spread globally. The risk to the UK public however remains at moderate on the advice of the UK Chief Medical Officers.
- I took part in a COBR ministerial meeting on the 5 February and it was agreed that all Departments should rapidly advance planning for a reasonable worst case scenario. A letter was issued to TEO on the 6 February advising that they might want to consider convening a multi-agency meeting through the Civil Contingencies Group to assess sector resilience.
- The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has advised the UK CMOs that UK testing for novel coronavirus should be widened (from mainland China) and a letter from the Chief Medical Officer alerting the HSC system to this development was issued on 7 February.
- In total there are now 4 confirmed cases in the UK and the patients are receiving specialist NHS care. The number of confirmed cases in England is expected to increase as contacts of those already confirmed as positive are identified. Tried and tested infection control procedures are being used to prevent further spread of the virus.
- To date there have been no confirmed cases in Northern Ireland.
- 16 tests have been carried out in NI, 12 were negative and we are awaiting results in the other 4. We are not publicly announcing these tests and given the relatively small numbers being tested here at this time, we will continue to provide aggregated UK numbers to protect individual patient confidentiality. My Department issued a statement on the 7th February to counter unhelpful media speculation. We are likely

to see increasing numbers having tests over the coming period, this is precautionary. We do not intend to provide a running commentary.

- It is not unreasonable to assume that at some point we will have a positive case in Northern Ireland.
- From today, 10 February there will be 12 centres across the UK capable of carrying out tests. This will include a facility in Northern Ireland.
- The FCO repatriated a further 105 British and EU Nationals on 9 February. We understand that 7 Irish Nationals may also be on this flight. All the British and Irish nationals will be supported in isolation at a site near Milton Keynes.
- I understand that Department of Health and Social Care will be announcing the Emergency Health Protection (Coronavirus) 2020 Powers today. It will apply to England only. I have asked my officials to consider what additional public health legislation may be of benefit in our efforts to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus once we have cases confirmed in Northern Ireland.
- I want to reassure the Executive that my Department and the Public Health Agency continue to work closely with the relevant authorities and public health organisations across the UK and the Republic of Ireland to ensure Northern Ireland is well prepared to deal with the situation as events unfold.
- The CMO and my officials have been in regular contact with their contacts in the Republic of Ireland
- Emergency Operations Centres have been activated in my Department and the PHA and all relevant websites have been updated with advice for members of the public. The PHA are continuing to work closely with the Trusts, Port Health and primary care colleagues.

- There continues to be no room for complacency and my priority as Minister is still to ensure effective measures are in place within Northern Ireland.

Lines to take

- We are very likely to see further confirmed cases in the UK over coming days and weeks. We have agreed mechanisms for managing this situation, including early notification of any confirmed case and ensuring our general public remain appropriately informed and reassured to the actions being taken, as appropriate.
- I want to reassure colleagues that while the risk level is moderate there is no cause for alarm and it does not mean we think the risk to individuals in the UK has changed at this stage, but that we should plan for all eventualities.
- I have asked my officials to consider what additional public health legislation may be of benefit in our efforts to contain the future spread of the novel coronavirus in Northern Ireland.
- My Department, along with the PHA remain in regular contact with the relevant authorities across the UK and the Republic of Ireland to ensure any necessary precautions are in place in Northern Ireland in response to this situation.
- Along with Scotland and Wales, we are taking part in daily teleconferences 7 days a week hosted by DHSC to ensure the whole of the UK is appropriately prepared and a coordinated response ensues.
- My department will continue to remain in contact with officials in the Republic of Ireland and will work closely with officials and public health colleagues here in the event of a case here.

- Our regular communication with colleagues across the UK and Republic of Ireland has been invaluable to ensuring a coordinated and consistent approach, in the challenging setting of an ever changing situation.
- We have been working closely with our PHA and communications teams throughout the 4 nations to ensure we are sending out clear, coordinated and consistent messages e UK.