

Briefing

Steer: We expect that the trilat will focus on vaccines and mass testing, after significant progress was made on both last week.

- **Vaccines:** The first vaccinations in NI will take place on Tuesday (08/12) in hospital settings. You may wish to discuss vaccinations on the island of Ireland and the ability of people to access the vaccine within the CTA and any impact this could have on cross-border Healthcare.
- **Mass Testing:** NIE are still working on the rollout of a mass testing scheme, with final decisions to be made on what community size, whether to target certain professions (like taxi drivers) within this, and how to best encourage compliance.

Christmas Divergence: There are also ongoing questions around coordination over the festive period that it would be useful to raise now that Ireland have decided on their plans. NIE have announced the measures in place after the current circuit breaker, and that there will be an extra day for festive travel in NI on December 22, to reflect the difficulty of GB-NI travel. This means that there are three different easing periods:

- UK: 5 days from 23-27 December
- NI: 7 days from 22-28 December
- IE: 19 days from 18 December to 6 January.

EU Travel Ban: There is also the issue of the UK potentially being treated as a third party state by the European council after 1 January - with regards to the travel ban Schengen countries have imposed on third party countries from March 2020 - due to Covid-19. Ireland is not bound by this ban as it is not part of the Schengen area but it would be useful to assess Ireland's thinking on this, we would anticipate they would protect travel between NI and Ireland in any circumstance. This was due to be discussed at Monday's Covid-O/XO which was cancelled.

Lines to take

- As vaccines begin to be rolled out today across the UK, I would be keen to discuss how NI and IE plan to approach border communities and the ability to travel within the island of Ireland for vaccinations.
- I am also keen to assist any messaging encouraging people to be vaccinated, is there any plan for how this will be approached in border communities?
- I am aware that a pilot testing programme is underway at Queen's University, as the Department of Health prepares for the wider roll-out of mass-testing. Is there anything I can do to help with the delivery of this?
- I am keen to understand how we can work together to ensure a coherent message over the festive period, as families travel home for Christmas and gather together.
- Are there any specific points on travel between GB/NI/IE that it would be helpful to pick up at the next quad or trilat meeting?

Agenda

1. Introductions	Objective: to facilitate collaboration at this critical time
2. Covid General Updates a. Case numbers	Cases per 100,00, 7 & 14-day cumulative figures <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ UK: 159 (up from 151) and 316.9 (down from 319)□ NI: 165 (up from 157.2) and 296.3 (up from 289.4)□ Ireland: 40.88 (down from 40.9) and 77.2 (down from 77.6)□ Hotspots (14-day rate):<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ NI: Mid and East Antrim (329), Belfast (396)
3. Areas for cooperation	Immediate <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Vaccinations and Mass testing.
4. Actions & next meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Date of next meeting: we anticipate this will be delayed, as the next meeting is due 23 December.

Background

Vaccines

With rollout commencing today, there has been some discussion between FCDO and DHSC on the ability of Irish people to travel within the CTA to access vaccinations. People are able to travel for 'essential healthcare' within the CTA so it would be useful to understand John Callinan's take on this issue. Robin Swann has already confirmed that those working for the NHS in Northern Ireland, but living in Ireland, will be vaccinated by Northern Ireland. We currently anticipate that travel will take place in exceptional circumstances, and we are keen to see what work is being done in NI and IE to prepare for the delivery of vaccines in border communities.

Mass Testing

The most recent steer from officials is that the Executive are considering smaller communities to operate mass testing within, not the roughly 100,000 person local council areas originally planned. This is being considered along targeted jobs and communities after FM and dFM were updated on plans in Scotland and Wales which were closer to this. Officials still consider mass testing could begin this year.

Christmas Planning

Given that different sets of restrictions will be in place north and south of the border, there is a risk of non-compliance, especially travel across the border to access non-essential retail and hospitality venues.

Cases in Northern Ireland

Having fallen from over 200 around a month ago, cases are rising again in Northern Ireland, as Northern Ireland heads into more relaxed set of restrictions in December. It would be useful to gauge TEO's level of concern, as FM expressed concern that R was over 1 last week.