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From: John OFarrell [IMCEAEX-
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Sent: 18/09/2020 16:18:35
To: Angela Moffatt [angela.moffatt@prospect.org.uk]; Ann Speed Unison [a.speed@unison.co.uk]; Anne [athompson@siptu.ie]; Barbara [e.robson@unison.co.uk]; David Kennedy [northernireland@cwu.org]; Denise Walker [denise.walker@gmb.org.uk]; Dooley Ha [e.robson@unison.co.uk]; Gayle Matthews [gayle@pcs.org.uk]; Geraldine Hughes [Geraldine.Hughes@gmb.org.uk]; Gerry Murphy [gillian.belch@ictuni.org]; Helena McSherry [PD@hotmail.com]; Jackie Pollock [jackie.pollock@unitetheunion.com]; Jacquie Wh [jim.quinn@fbu.org.uk]; John OFarrell [John.OFarrell@ictuni.org]; John-Patrick Clayton [J.Clayton@unison.co.uk]; Justin McCamphill [Clarke [kclarke@ucu.org.uk]; Kevin Doherty [Kevin.Doherty@ictuni.org]; Margaret Galloway [PD@ntlworld.com]; Mar O'Coisneachain [martina.ocoisneachain@nipsa.org.uk]; Niall McNalley [nmcnally@suptu.ie]; Owen Reidy [owen.reidy@ictuni.org]; Pac Mackel [pmackel@ucu.org.uk]; Patricia McKeown [p.mckeown@unison.co.uk]; [Name Redacted]@communities-ni.gov.uk
Subject: PHA Update September 2020

Folks on NIC (& Health & Education Cttes)

See the below, and thanks to Maria for passing it to us.

J

From: Maria Morgan [<mailto:Maria.Morgan@nipsa.org.uk>]
Sent: 18 September 2020 12:47
To: Owen Reidy <Owen.Reidy@ictuni.org>; Alison Millar <alison.millar@nipsa.org.uk>
Cc: Speed, Anne <A.Speed@unison.co.uk>
Subject: PHA Update September 2020

Owen,
Health Unions had a presentation from PHA yesterday and they sent on the update below as a follow up, may be of interest to NIC.
Thanks
Maria

Hi All,

Please see below this month's PHA Update. The aim of the PHA Update is to help maintain a source of regular communication with our stakeholders on key areas of work, with particular focus at present on COVID-19.

To subscribe to the PHA Update click here: www.pha.site/subscribeupdate

Please share this link with anyone you feel would benefit from receiving the Update.

Thank you
Kind Regards

NR

NR
Communications Officer
Corporate and Public Affairs



Public Health Agency

12 - 22 Linenhall Street

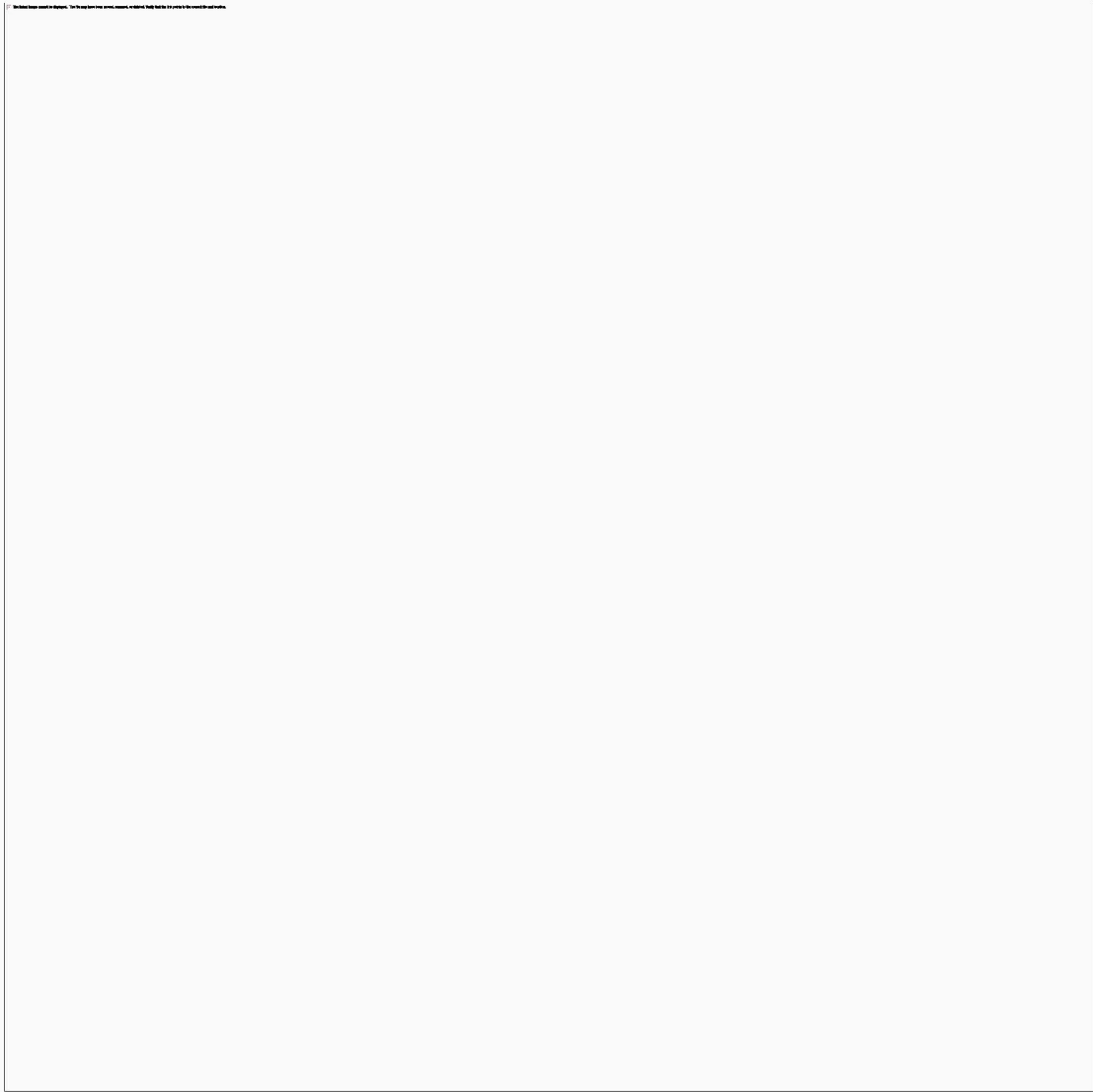
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Public Health Agency (PHA) Update September 2020

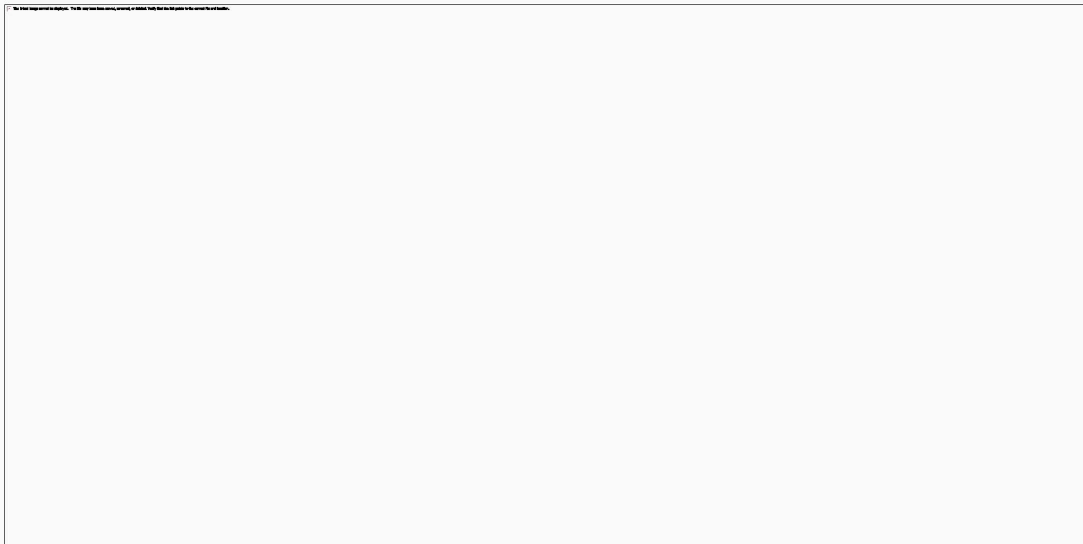
**Dealing with the challenges facing
Test, Trace and Protect**

The Trace, Trace and Protect programme has come under significant pressure over the past week, with an increase in cases, the return of schools, and issues with the UK-wide Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) online test booking system having an impact on the availability of testing slots and some people being offered testing locations outside Northern Ireland.

The most important message overall is that people should book a COVID-19 test if they develop any of the symptoms of the illness. **However, anyone who is not displaying any of these symptoms should avoid booking a test, as they could be taking the place of someone who needs one:**

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature); OR
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual); OR
- **a loss of or change in sense of smell or taste.**

If you have any of these symptoms, you should get tested in the first three days of them appearing, although testing is considered effective up until day five.



Testing issues

The booking system for testing in Northern Ireland is part of a UK-wide model operated by the DHSC.

This system has been under significant pressure right across the UK. In Northern Ireland, this has meant some people have found it hard to book tests, or have been offered tests at sites outside the jurisdiction.

No one in Northern Ireland is expected to travel to Scotland or England for a COVID-19 test. These slots were offered by the DHSC online booking system because it has sometimes not recognised local requirements.

We have been advising the DHSC on this and sought assurances from them that the problem is being addressed.

However we also need the public's help to keep tests available for those who need them. Testing is an essential part of the fight against COVID-19, and we want people to use the testing support that is available, but to do so appropriately.

We also know some people had an experience with the booking system recently that meant they were offered tests at locations that didn't have testing sites. These were generally for locations that previously had a mobile testing unit available. This was because the DHSC portal for booking tests did not immediately update with the new locations. On these occasions we have worked with our DHSC colleagues to resolve the situation as quickly as possible.

We continue to work with the DHSC to help ensure changes are made to the booking portal in a more timely manner to reflect the actual location of testing units, and have sought reassurances around this moving forward.

Tests can be booked at www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test, where you complete the online form, and you'll be offered a test at your nearest fixed or mobile testing unit. If you have questions about a test you've booked or are having trouble booking a test, you can call 119.

If you are unable to book a slot, please check back occasionally to the booking portal and if the sites are fully booked you will need to book for the following day.

The booking portal directs you to the closest place by your postcode. If you see this is not where you wish to travel to please return to the booking website at a later time and select a test site of your choice.

Six mobile testing units operate across Northern Ireland. Mobile testing units are short-term testing sites that are mobilised in response to need and/ or to provide additional testing capacity locally. They work in close collaboration with the four fixed sites located in Belfast, Enniskillen, Derry/ Londonderry and Craigavon. When a mobile testing unit is fully booked, members of the public are directed to another mobile testing unit or fixed site for their test. This helps ensure efficient use is made of our COVID-19 testing resources in Northern Ireland.

The issues faced by some people this week have undoubtedly been very frustrating for those affected, but we would urge anyone who needs a test to log on to the testing portal and rebook one if they have not yet done so.

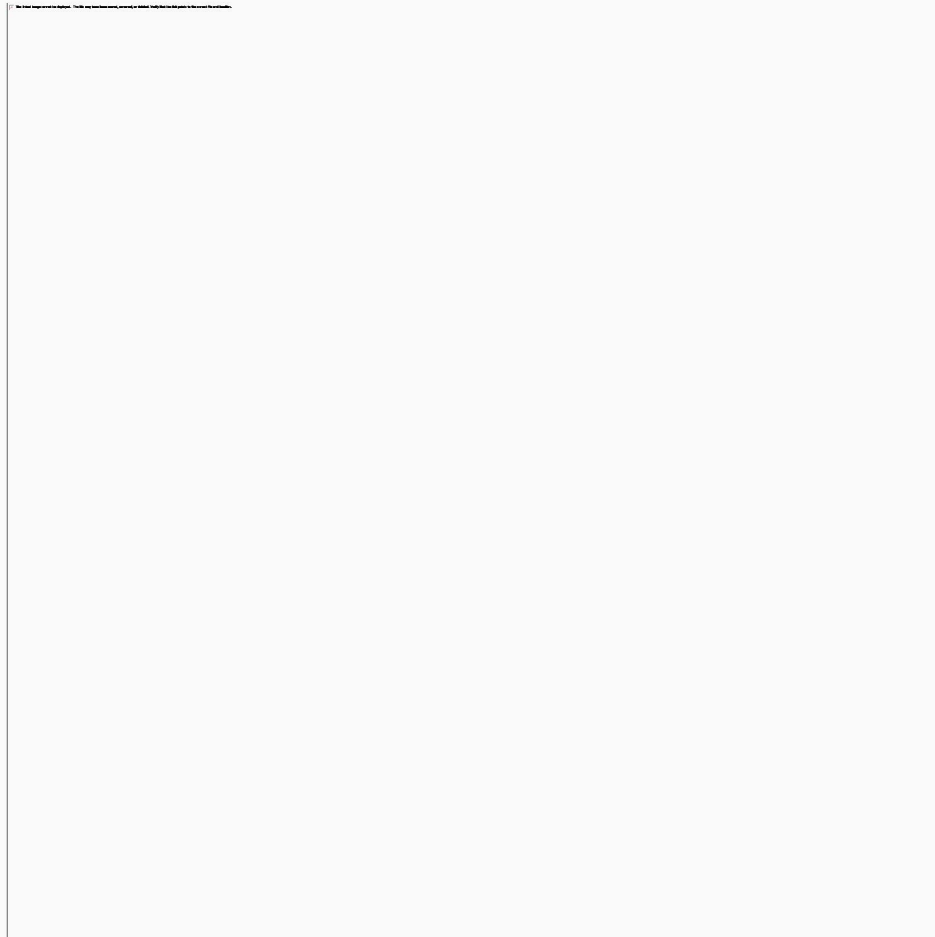
We would also remind all members of the public who have symptoms that they should continue to self-isolate until they have received their test results, as should members of their household, and they should follow the appropriate public health advice relating to their test result.

Information on the live location of mobile testing units is available on the PHA website at www.pha.site/cvtesting

Contact tracing

During the course of the past week, the combination of a delay in information coming through from the DHSC system on testing of members of the public (known as pillar 2 testing), combined with a significant increase in workload as a result of more cases and schools returning, resulted in some contact tracing delays. These are currently being addressed and work is continuing to recruit for and expand the service as planned to accommodate the anticipated rise in case numbers as we move into autumn and winter.

Primary and secondary education



As schools have returned, we have seen increased complexity in many cases which have required contact tracing, and understandably schools want to do the right thing by pupils, staff and the wider community.

As part of the ongoing development of new services to support the Test, Trace and Protect programme, we have now established a new, dedicated phone line to assist schools when there has been a positive test for coronavirus in an educational setting. This phone line is available seven days a week, and can be accessed by principals.

The phone line is operated by specialist public health staff who will support schools through the risk assessment process and provide guidance on next steps when a case of COVID-19 is confirmed in the school.

It is important to note that this is not a general helpline and should not be used as the first port of call for general advice by schools where there has been no confirmed case in an educational setting – **schools should continue to follow the ‘New School Day’ guidance available on the Department of Education website, which can be found [here](#).**

The Education Authority has provided guidance for schools with cases of COVID-19 – this can be found [here](#).

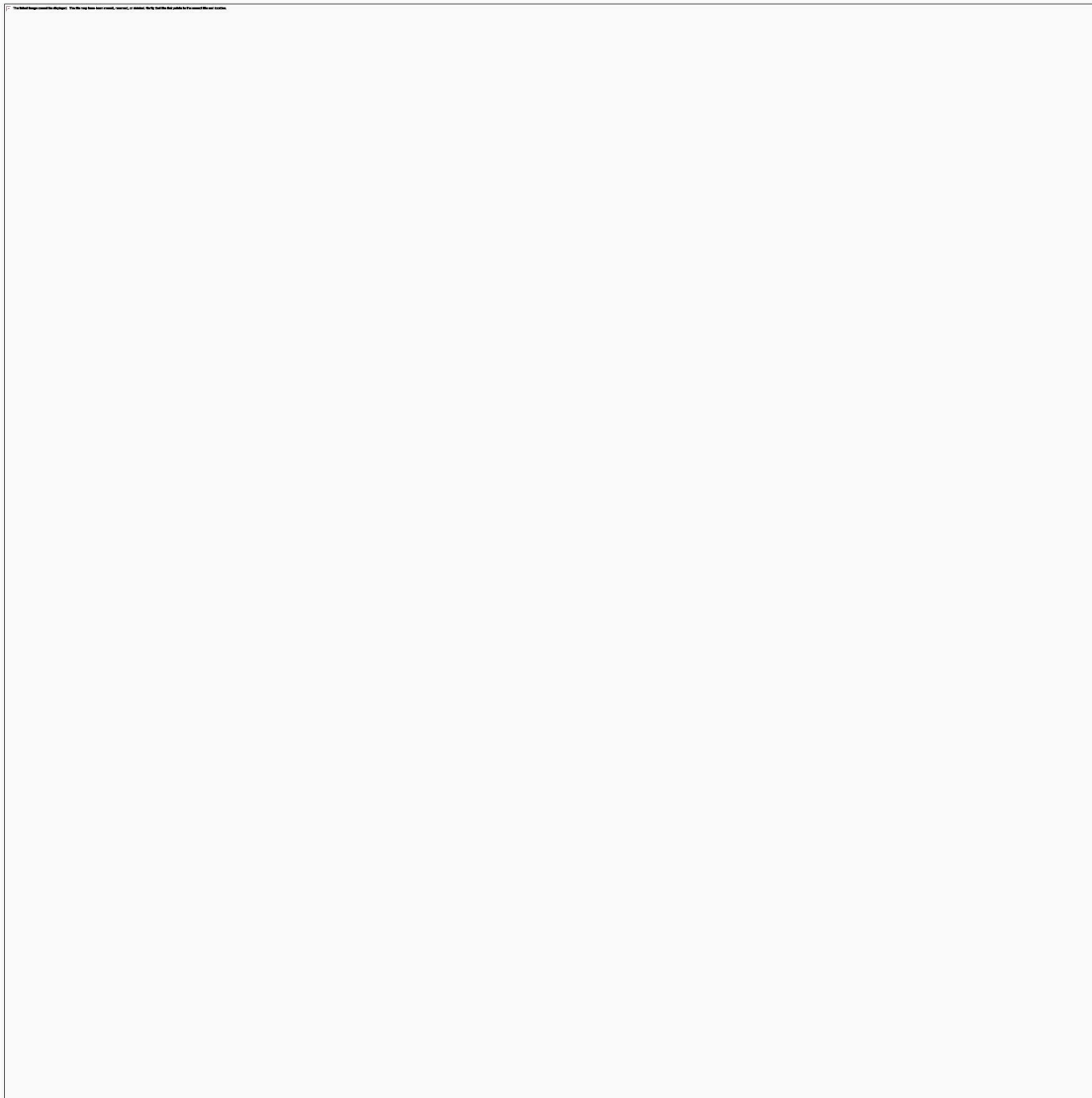
Further and Higher Education

Planning for the return of students to Further and Higher Education is being progressed involving PHA, QUB, UU and Local Government partners. A range of issues are currently being addressed in this work to ensure that the systems are in place to help mitigate risks as far as possible both for the student and host area populations.



The full PDF can be download [here](#).

Advice for parents with children at school



By Dr David Irwin, Consultant in Health Protection at the Public Health Agency.

A child shows up at school with a runny nose, is sneezing, no temperature. Can they be allowed into the classroom?

Provided the child does not have symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 – new continuous cough, high temperature or loss of smell/taste or have not been identified as a close contact – they can attend school.

A child has a head cold and mum or dad told the school that they would keep the child off until they were feeling better. The principal told the parent that the child wouldn't be allowed back until they are tested and provided evidence of a negative test – is that necessary?

Provided the child does not have symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 – new continuous cough,

high temperature or loss of smell/taste – and they feel well enough, they can attend school. Testing is not recommended unless a person has symptoms of COVID-19.

A school is notified by a parent that a pupil has tested positive – what happens to the rest of the class?

The PHA will work with the school to undertake a risk assessment to identify the children considered to be close contacts. These children, or if aged under 16 years the parents or guardians of the child, will be contacted by the contact tracing team and advised to self-isolate, irrespective of whether they have a negative COVID-19 test. Provided the child and everyone else in their household has no COVID-19 symptoms, the remainder of the household can carry on with their normal activities.

If a person is contacted by the contact tracers and told to self-isolate for 14 days – should they get tested?

If you are contacted by the contact tracing team and advised to self-isolate for 14 days you should do so. Currently testing is not recommended unless you develop symptoms of COVID-19 – a negative result would not affect the need to remain in self-isolation.

The Department of Education leaflet on information for parents and carers on keeping schools safe and helping to stop the spread, can be found [here](#).

For further information on symptoms and how to get tested see:

www.publichealth.hscni.net

Flu vaccination programme begins on 1 October

The flu vaccination programme in Northern Ireland is being expanded to help protect vulnerable people and relieve winter pressures during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The current groups eligible for a free flu vaccination are everyone aged 65 and over, pregnant

women, those aged under 65 years of age in clinical “at risk” groups, all children aged 2 to 4, all primary school pupils, and frontline health and social care workers.

Additional vaccine has been secured which will allow for the following groups to receive a free flu vaccination during the 2020/21 flu vaccination programme:

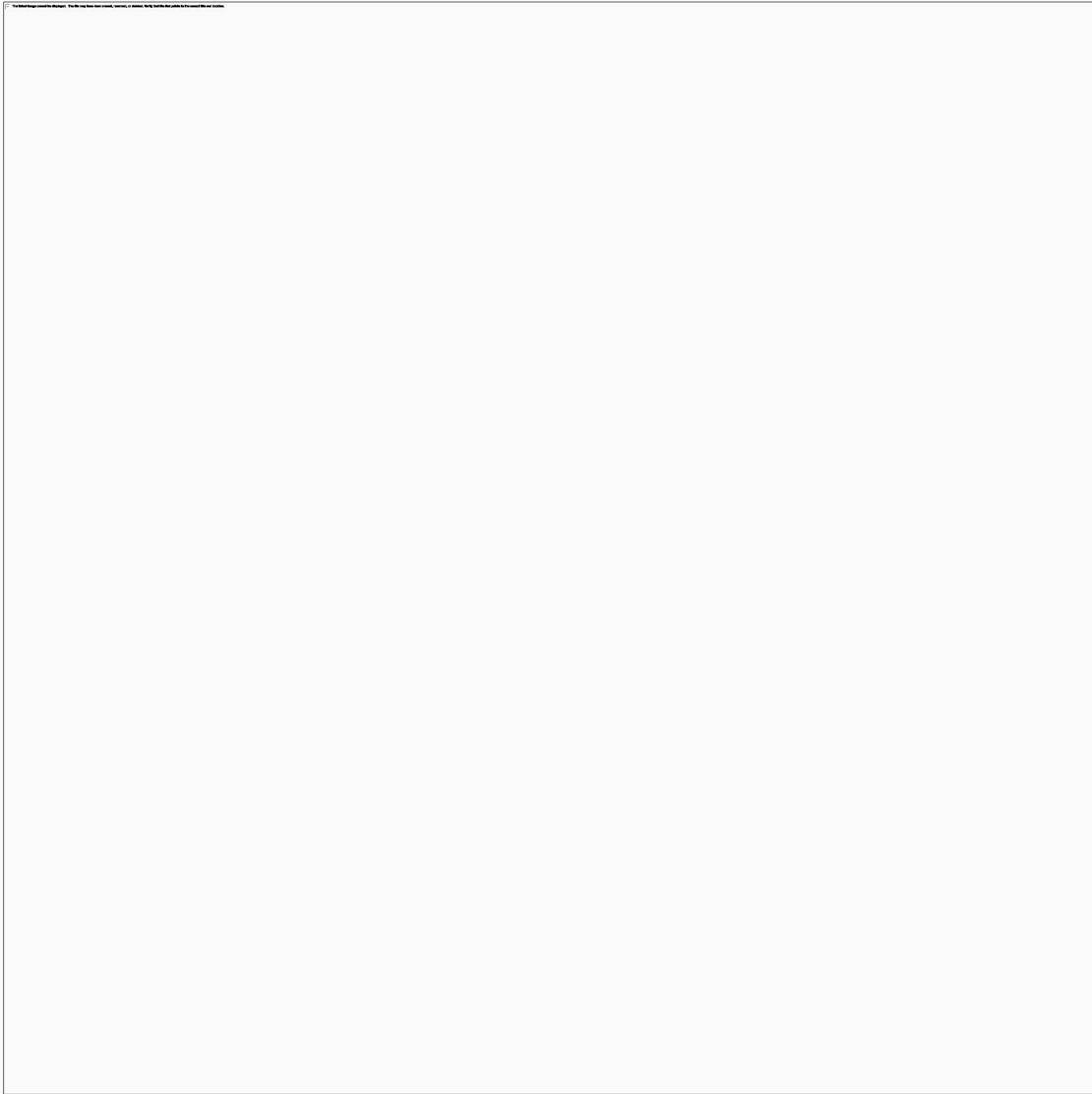
- Household contacts of those who received shielding letters during the COVID-19 pandemic can request vaccination via their GP;
- Staff in independent care homes; and
- School children in year 8 i.e. those who will be in the first year of secondary school from September 2020.

Subject to vaccine availability, the programme may be extended by December to include those in the 50-64 year old age group, starting with the oldest first. This extension will be phased to allow GP practices to prioritise those in a clinical at risk group.

Everyone who is eligible for a free flu vaccine should take this opportunity and help protect themselves and those around them this winter.

The vaccine will be available through the schools programme, from GPs, and through Trust vaccination schemes for staff.

PHA annual flu vaccination programme leaflets are available at: www.pha.site/flu-leaflets



Guidance on social distancing for blind and partially sighted people

RNIB NI, working in partnership with Guide Dogs NI, has developed guidance on social distancing for blind and partially sighted people in Northern Ireland.

This guidance is designed to assist blind and partially sighted people to safely resume their lives

within existing government and public health advice.

NI Guidance on Social Distancing if you are Blind or Partially Sighted addresses the needs of blind and partially sighted people specifically and covers a range of issues including guiding and mask wearing.

- [NI Guidance on Social Distancing if you are Blind or Partially Sighted](#) (APDF)
- [NI Guidance on Social Distancing if you are Blind or Partially Sighted](#) (Word)

NI Social Distancing Guidelines – how you can support Blind and Partially Sighted people is aimed at raising awareness among the wider public and service providers and offers tips on how to support blind and partially sighted people to resume their everyday activities as society begins to emerge from lockdown.

- [NI Social Distancing Guidelines - how you can support Blind and Partially Sighted people](#) (APDF)
- [NI Social Distancing Guidelines - how you can support Blind and Partially Sighted people](#) (Word)

The guidelines have been produced in conjunction with the Public Health Agency, Health and Social Care Board and Trust Sensory Support Teams. They are underpinned by current public health advice and Government guidance on COVID-19 and relevant infection prevention measures.

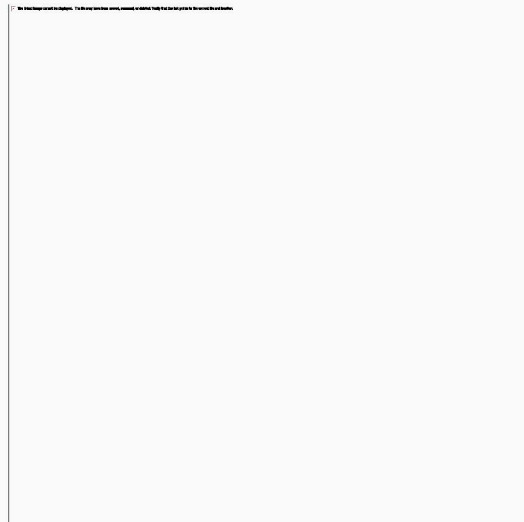
Coronavirus weekly and monthly bulletins

The PHA produces weekly and monthly bulletins on the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Ireland.

The Weekly COVID-19 Bulletin presents high level data on key areas currently being used to monitor COVID-19 activity and highlights current issues and public health messages, while the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Monthly Epidemiological Bulletin will combine this information with analysis of the demographic characteristics (age, sex, geographical location, deprivation) of people affected by the virus.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Monthly Epidemiological Bulletin also looks at some of the wider impact of the virus on the healthcare system, comparing recent trends in activity with historic norms.

You can view the bulletins [here](#).



Everyone must help stop coronavirus spreading

If you go outside stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people.

Wear a face covering where needed.

Avoid touching your face and wash your hands as soon as you get home.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

Observe hand and respiratory hygiene – wash hands with soap and water regularly and catch coughs/sneezes in a tissue, bin and wash hands.

Download and activate the StopCOVID NI app from Apple or Google Play to your smartphone.



You can download the app from your phone's app store:

[Google Play Store](#)

[Apple App Store](#)

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 – immediately self-isolate and seek testing.

Back to school

By Duane Farrell, CEO, Relate NI and Danny Sinclair, PHA

Schools are back, and after almost six months of upheaval, it's no surprise that settling back in will take some time and adjustment.

It may still feel overwhelming and even daunting to our children and young people. As adults we may be feeling the same!

So how can we support our children as they adjust?

Routine

A good sleep routine is particularly important. There are [guidelines on the amount of sleep children need](#), and they may be surprising.

Prepare as much as possible in advance, for example, school uniforms laid out, lunches made etc. Being organised is key!

Help your child know what to expect

Use the information from school to help your child know what to expect. Preparing children prevents surprises and can help them to feel a sense of safety and security.

Ask them how they are feeling

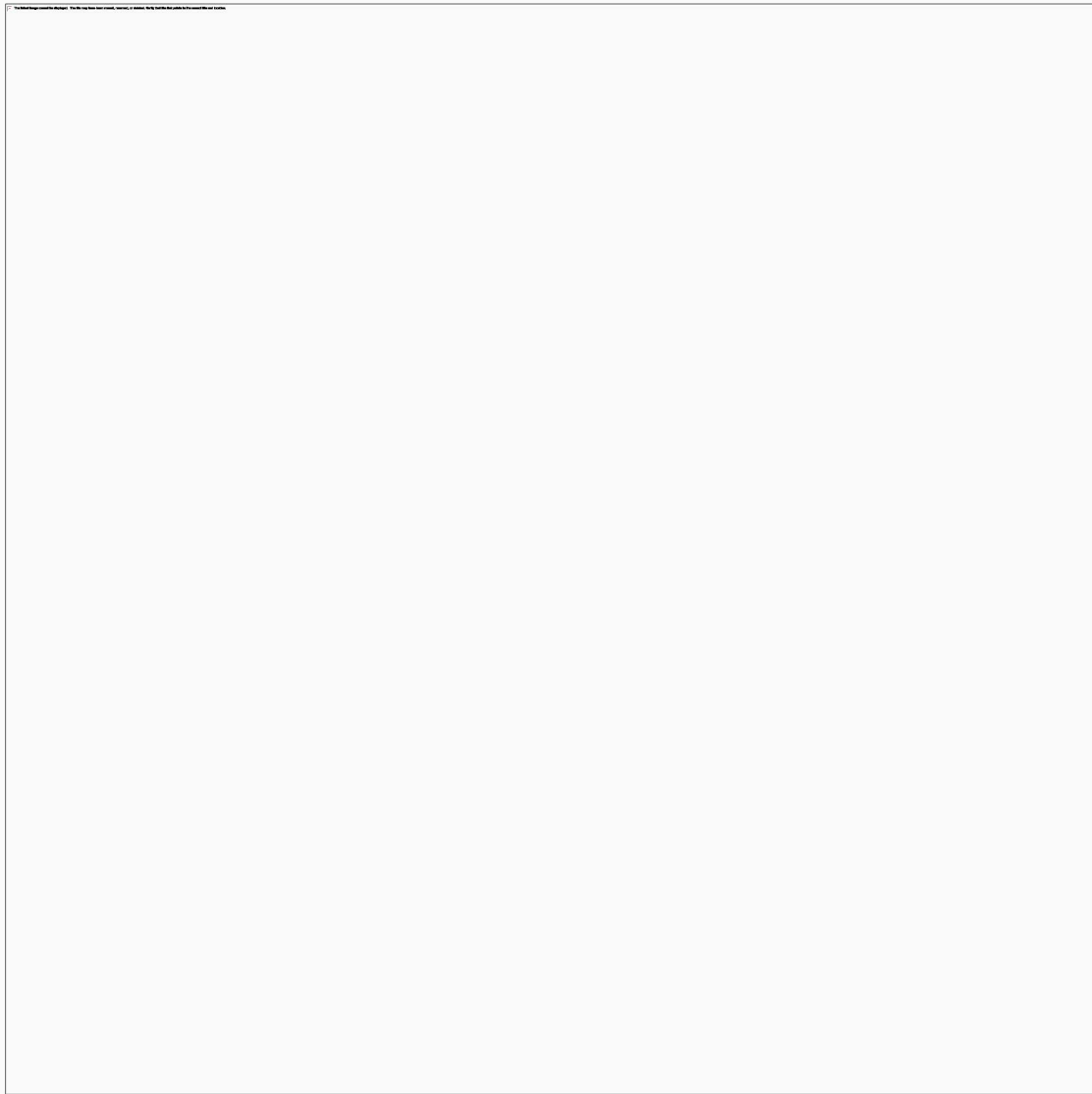
Ask your child about what they enjoyed about their day or what they found difficult. This can encourage them to open up and share their feelings.

Look after ourselves and each other

Looking after ourselves is so important. Try and take time for yourself. Remember that we are all human and doing the best we can.

Most importantly, remember this is a new phase for us all, including our schools. We are all learning as we go along, and there may be more change and adjustment along the way. Maintain a focus on the positives when you can and reach out for support, including from your child's school, when you need it.

You can view the full blog at www.pha.site/Backtoschool

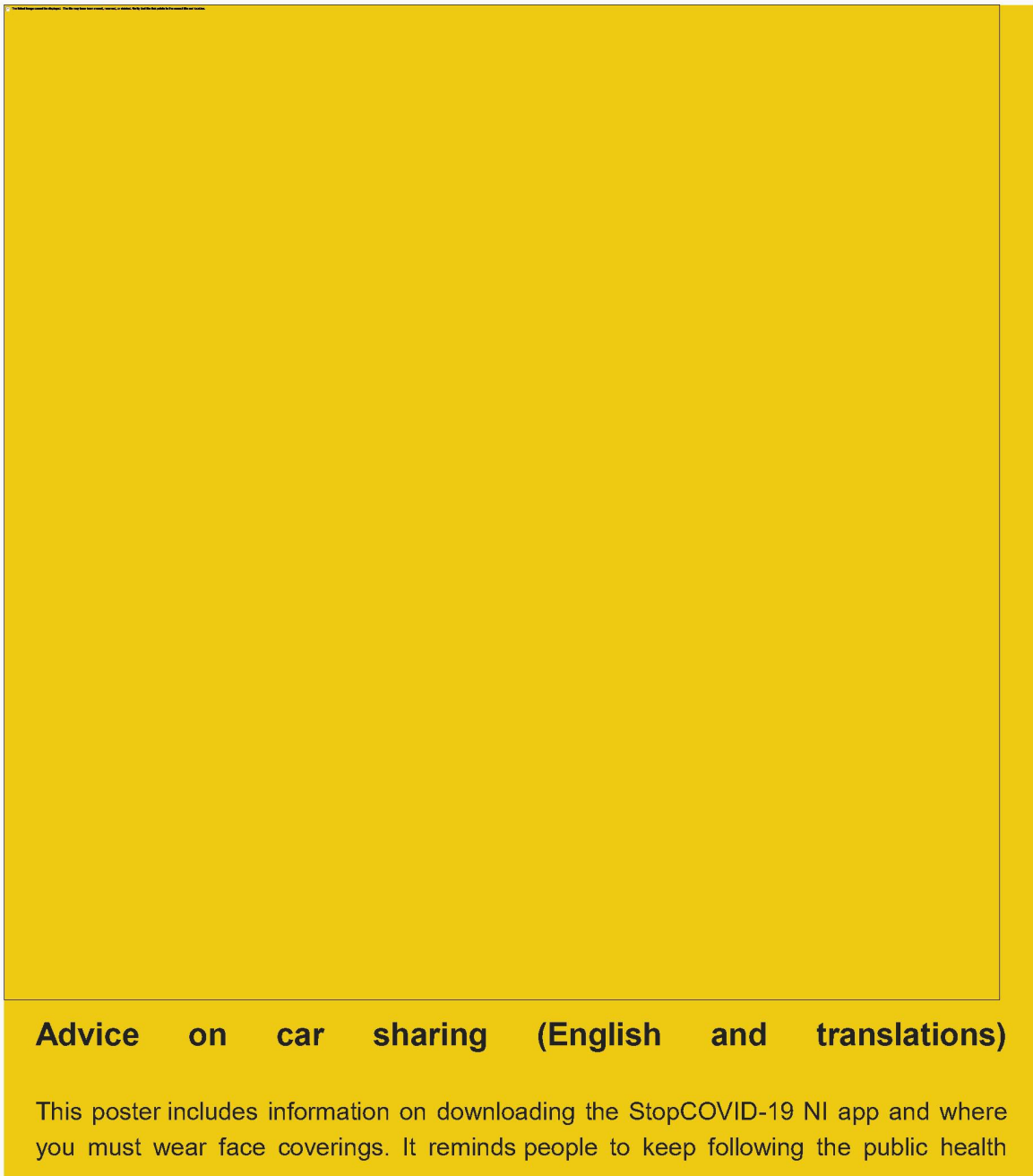


'Working Together To Promote Mental Wellbeing' has been launched by the PHA along with five Health and Social Care Trusts, the NI Ambulance Service and the Health and Social Care Board, who with the community and voluntary sectors will work together to promote ways to support our mental wellbeing, with co-ordinated messages and links to support on social media including to the updated resources website www.mindingyourhead.info

Over the next five weeks the campaign will focus on the 'Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing', which offers practical ideas to help support people with protecting and improving their own mental wellbeing and those around them.

The Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing are evidence based, easy to follow steps to help maintain and improve your wellbeing. The steps are-Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give.

Olive MacLeod, Chief Executive, PHA, said: "In the current climate it is even more important we work together with a united voice with our local communities to encourage everyone to look after their own mental and emotional wellbeing and that of others. We want to promote each of the Take 5 messages and the range of resources and support available. We should think of these as our 'five-a-day' for wellbeing and build these into our daily lives."



messages of social distancing and respiratory and hand hygiene and highlights what to do if you have symptoms, including booking a test. It can be downloaded [here](#).

Key principles for HSC Trust staff visiting community settings

The PHA has produced a brief guide summarising the key principles HSC staff should follow when visiting community settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The document offers advice on reducing footfall in community settings and minimising workforce movement between settings, managing visits to reduce the risk of cross infection, and enhancing PPE and other protective measures. You can download the guide [here](#).

COVID-19 (coronavirus) Stay safe, save lives poster

This poster includes information on downloading the StopCOVID-19 NI app and where you must wear face coverings. It reminds people to keep following the public health messages of social distancing and respiratory and hand hygiene and highlights what to do if you have symptoms, including booking a test and is available to download [here](#).

Drug overdose and coronavirus (COVID-19)

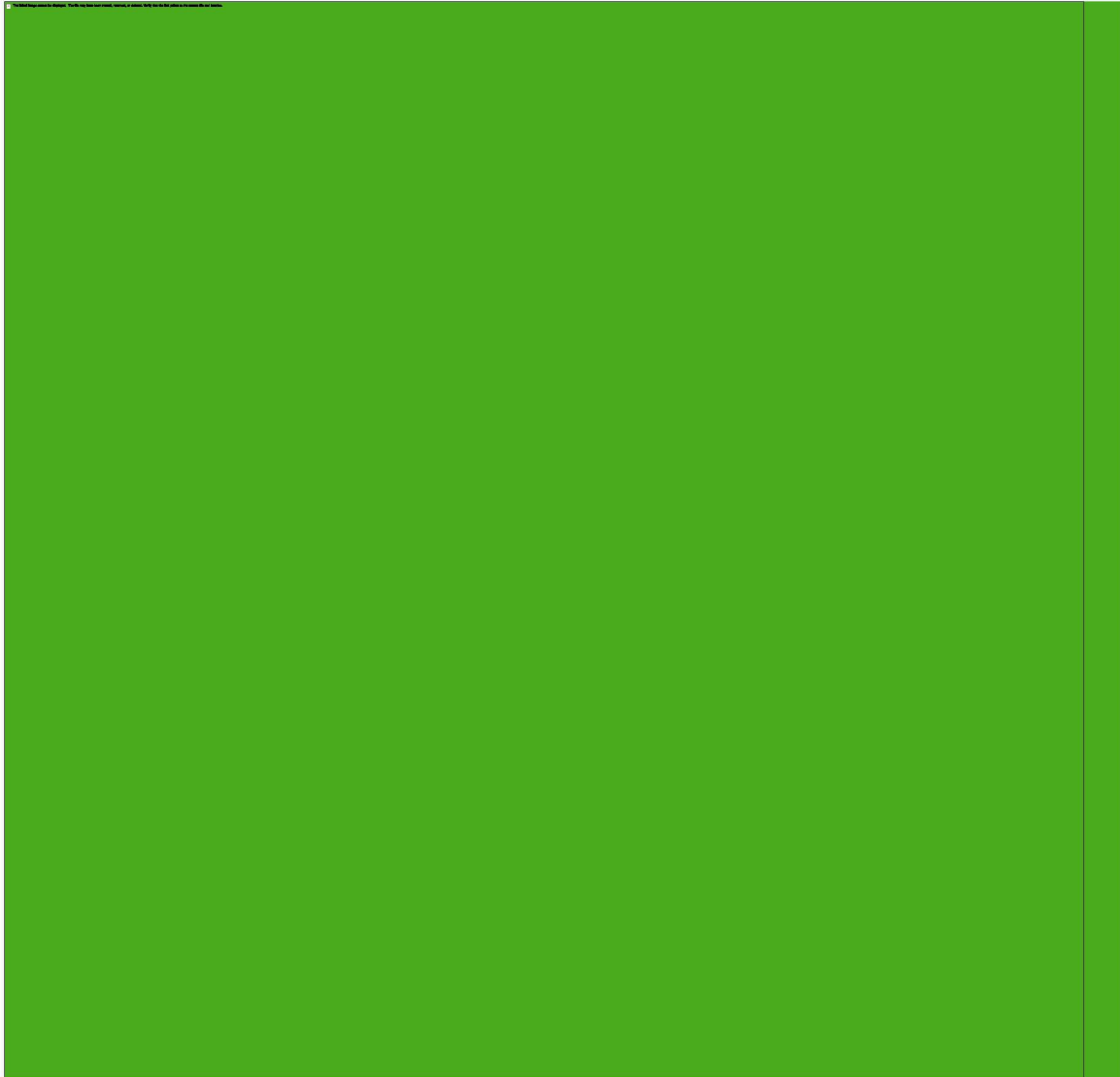
This poster provides harm reduction advice for people who use drugs, highlighting the additional risks in relation to the coronavirus pandemic. The poster can download [here](#).

Helplines are playing an important role during the coronavirus pandemic, and the PHA is working with colleagues across a wide range of sectors as part of Helplines NI.

Helplines NI is a membership-led network created and supported by the Public Health Agency. There are now over 30 helpline members listed on the Helplines NI website at www.helplinesni.com.

Helpline services operating across Northern Ireland are still available and providing immediate information, advice and support on a wide range of health and wellbeing issues. Anyone can access these services and people do not require a referral. Many of the services take place over the phone, but some can help via email, text and in some cases with live web-chat. A number of new helplines have been set up in response to COVID-19. They are providing information and advice in relation to the impact of the virus, for

example, befriending helplines, the COVID-19 Community Support Helpline, COVID-19 Roma Community Helpline, and the HMRC COVID-19 Helpline for businesses.



The coronavirus pandemic is undoubtedly having an impact on people's mental health, so it is important to recognise if we or those close to us are experiencing stress, depression or other mental health issues, and seek support. The PHA's website www.mindingyourhead.info has information and advice on looking after your mental health, as well as information on a range of services available to provide support.

If you or someone you know is in distress or despair, contact Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.

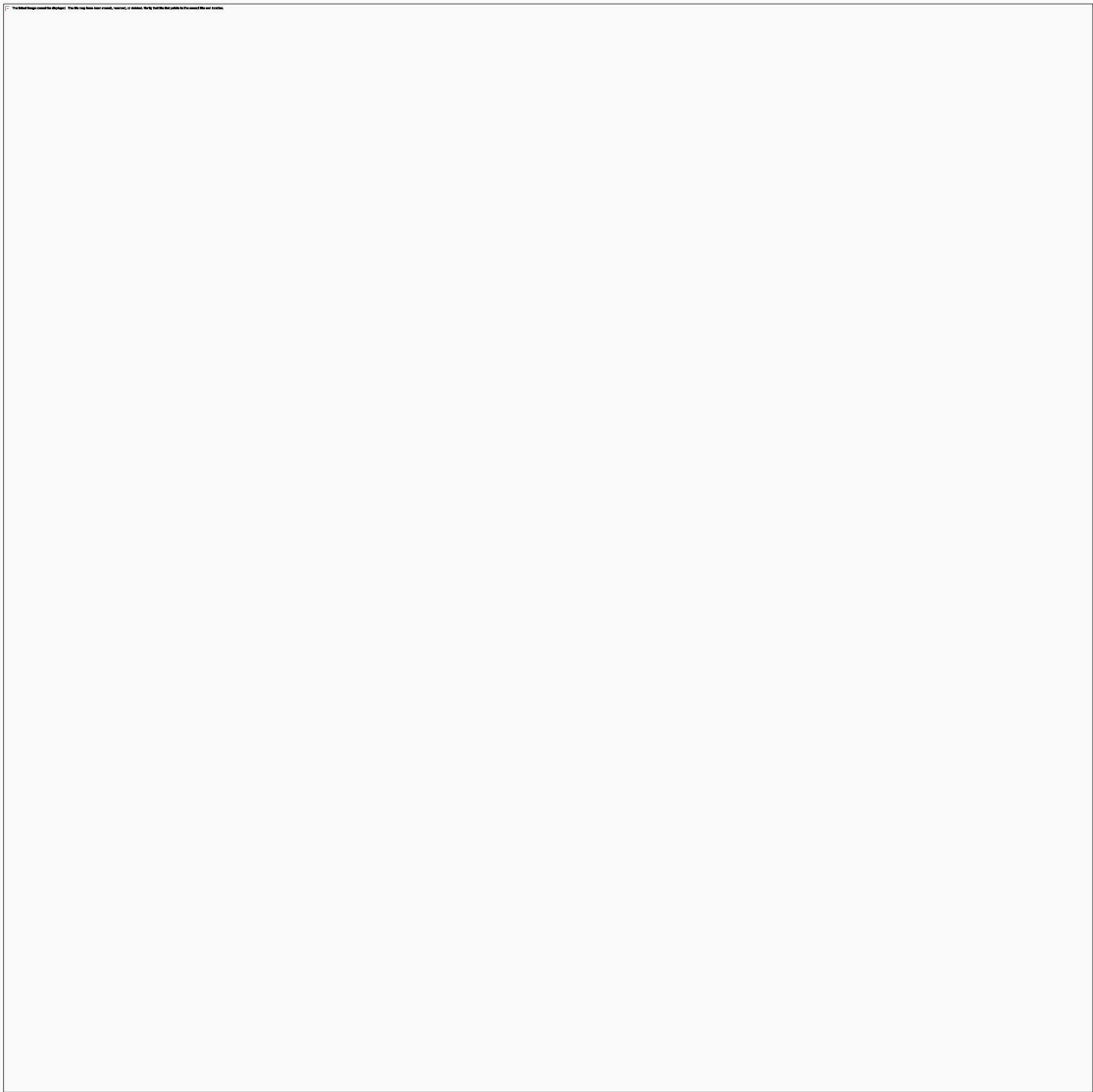
Subscribe to PHA Update

Through the update we hope to increase awareness and knowledge of the work of the PHA and share news of our programmes and activities. Subscribers will receive a monthly update, and occasionally we also send special issues for major announcements.

The aim of the PHA Update is to help maintain a source of regular communication with our stakeholders on key areas of work, with particular focus at present on COVID-19.

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