

## Coronavirus death toll will include care homes



Stormont health minister Robin Swann

Brendan Hughes

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(//www.irishnews.com/picturesarchive/irishnews/irishnews/2020/04/14/202817659-84a314e3-7ba1-436c-8245-b00181a37956.jpg)

Chief medical officer Michael McBride.

Picture by Liam McBurney/PA

CARE home deaths will be included in weekly Covid-19 bulletins following concerns that they were not being reported in the same way as hospital statistics.

The number of care homes affected by coronavirus in Northern Ireland has increased to 32.

Stormont health minister Robin Swann yesterday confirmed the number, which represents a rise on the figure of 20 announced last week.

It came as the north's chief medical officer **said the number of Covid-19 deaths in care homes remains unclear**

(<http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2020/04/14/news/coronavirus-care-home-deaths-can-t-be-included-in-daily-figures--1901884/>).

Dr Michael McBride said registering deaths that occur outside of hospital settings is complex, but insisted that every death is collated.

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**Ten more people diagnosed with Covid-19 have died**

(<http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2020/04/14/news/coronavirus-hospitals-see-10-more-deaths-with-total-now-at-134-1902225/>) in hospital in Northern Ireland, bringing the total number of hospital deaths to 134.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) also confirmed 85 new positive tests for Covid-19 in Northern Ireland, bringing the total number of cases to 1,967.

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Questions have been raised over why deaths with Covid-19 in care homes have not been included in the daily PHA updates.

**Read More: Six residents at Belfast care home die after Covid-19 diagnosis**

(<http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2020/04/14/news/six-residents-at-belfast-care-home-die-after-covid-19-diagnosis-1900969/>)

In the Republic, its figures have shown more than half of those who have died with Covid-19 were care home residents.

Stormont's Department of Health said it is not possible for PHA's bulletins to accurately pick up on a daily basis the deaths that occur outside of hospital settings.

It said Nisra's weekly bulletin on all deaths registered in Northern Ireland has been amended to provide information on Covid-19 related deaths across hospital and community settings.

This is not currently broken down by hospital and other locations, but the department said it will work to "ensure that all published statistics give as full a picture as possible".

Last night Mr Swann welcomed a commitment by Nisra to publish statistics on deaths and suspected deaths in care homes related to Covid-19.

"Currently, the reporting of Covid-19 deaths falls into two main categories. The Public Health Agency publishes a daily surveillance report, which includes information on deaths reported by Trusts and focuses mainly on hospital-based deaths.

"This is important information which enables comparison with other regions who follow the same pandemic reporting protocols. Clearly, for such comparisons to be meaningful and valid the data must be produced on a similar basis.

"In addition, NISRA is publishing weekly deaths statistics that include suspected and confirmed COVID-19 related deaths across hospital and community settings.

"I welcome NISRA's intention to provide a further level of breakdown including, as soon as possible, information on deaths in care homes.

"It's in everyone's interests for published statistics to give as full a picture as possible on Covid-19. We need maximum public awareness on the seriousness of the virus and its potentially devastating consequences."

Earlier the health department also said testing in care homes is being increased.

The minister said he wanted to "make clear that testing of any care home resident or staff member displaying Covid-19 symptoms is being undertaken".

"This is an important measure to help residents stay safe. Vital work is being done by the HSC system to support care homes and their residents at this time," he said.

There are 484 care homes in Northern Ireland, with a total of around 16,000 beds.

Earlier this week, it emerged two Belfast care homes have suffered several deaths of residents diagnosed with coronavirus.

Bradley Manor in north Belfast confirmed six residents had died in recent weeks, including five diagnosed in hospital and a sixth who died in the care home.

Our Lady's care home in west Belfast also confirmed four of its residents diagnosed with coronavirus had died.

A fifth resident was suspected to have died with the virus but it was not yet confirmed.

Sinn Féin MLA Colm Gildernew, chair of the assembly health committee, previously raised concerns about "serious limitations" in the currently published data and urged for community testing to be scaled up.

DUP MLA Pam Cameron, vice-chair of the committee, welcomed efforts to make the statistics more accurate.

"There will inevitably be some delay resulting from the process of certifying deaths," she said.

"The real toll of this virus in countries will only be clear months down the line when we can see the overall death rate over the period from all conditions and compare against other years."

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