

Northern Ireland Office

Covid 19

Situation Report **15**

New information in **RED**

Contact: **Covid-19@nio.gov.uk**

17:30 on **31** March 2020

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Overview

NI Update

UK Position

Case Numbers (as of 31 March)

England 21,008 (18,584)

Wales 1563 (1451)

Scotland 1993 (1563)

Northern Ireland 586 (533)

TOTAL 25,150 (22,141)

Deaths (NI) 28 (22)

Deaths (UK) 1801 (1408)

Republic of Ireland cases: 2910 (2615)

Government Updates:

- Voucher scheme launches for schools providing free school meals. Weekly shopping vouchers worth £15 to spend at supermarkets while schools are closed due to coronavirus. (The Executive are using direct payments to families as opposed to vouchers.)
- Foreign NHS staff to be given one-year visa extensions automatically.
- Foreign Secretary announces new plan to fly home tens of thousands of Britons stranded abroad by the coronavirus.

Update from NICS:

This morning Finance Minister Conor Murphy presented the budget, announcing an additional allocation of £912m to deal with the C-19 crisis (of which £639m has been allocated). He also confirmed they would shortly provide an update on how much PPE had been ordered with Irish government. In the health service there is a continued focus on expanding critical care capacity (technical review of possible field hospital sites) and ramping up testing. A phonecall took place between SoSNI, FM & DFM, NI and ROI Health Ministers and Tanaiste this afternoon to discuss developments and co-ordinating where possible.

Update from Irish: The Taoiseach said the Government was not going to close Irish borders to stop the spread of the virus (in response to calls from some). He said there were Irish people abroad who still need to come home, and said imports and exports needed to continue. However, the Taoiseach did confirm that the National Public Health Emergency Team will consider further measures that can be taken to reduce imported cases and tackle the concentration of cases taking place in care homes

UKG: Cabinet Secretary will write to departments today outlining the new structures for the Covid-19 response and priority projects (with details of SROs) for each MIG. This will include text on the importance of taking a UK-wide approach and working with DAs. NO10 has asked for information about N/S cooperation and we are providing a note.

NI Economy: Economists are speculating that the NI **that emerges at the end of this period will look quite different from the one we are used to**, and many businesses won't survive. This may accelerate the closure of many struggling NI firms, especially in the manufacturing sector. Some economists say a recession is certain and a depression is likely if restrictions continue long term. Meanwhile, the Executive is concerned about freight transport and what mitigations may need to be put in place to secure essential supply lines. Belfast-London passenger flights and NI-GB ferry services continue at reduced frequency.

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Policy Challenges

International - SoSNI and FM/dFM remain in regular contact, and today had a productive four-way call with the Tánaiste and NI/ IE health ministers. Work continues on a health MoU between IE and NI. The Irish system remains under significant pressure as work is being stepped up to form a Government - as a result there is a pause in the trilateral (UKG/IG/NIE) engagement and in plans for a BIIGC/BIC while the Irish system is given space over the next few days. BE Dublin have fed back that the Irish side would be happy to rearrange the trilateral for this week: that work is now in progress. A coordination meeting of NIO/CO/FCO DGs takes place tomorrow.

Preparedness - Today's GPSMIG discussed tax rules for contractors, prisons and borders planning and resilience at UK ports. On prisons, the NI Justice Minister has announced plans for temporary early release of around 200 prisoners sentenced to less serious crimes. This would not include those serving a sentence for a terror offence. All those released would be subject to conditions (e.g. a curfew). This position differs from the stance adopted so far by the PM for prisons in England and Wales, where with very limited exceptions (e.g. pregnant women) we understand the PM is opposed to any early release. On borders, The borders item did not discuss the land border but Ministers were advised to stress that it is critical any proposals consider implications for the CTA. More broadly, the preparedness team is working closely with the economy team on concerns from NICS about the impacts for food and other essential goods supplies of any reduced flow at the UK border and difficulties for freight transport between GB and NI. We are also expecting NIE to publish guidance on care of the deceased by 1 April 2020.

Health - Work is ongoing with CCS, CO and NICS to improve upon the NI data being reflected in the UK Dashboard focusing on missing datasets. Healthcare MIG today had a English focus on volunteers and shielding. SOS DHSC chaired a 4 nation call on health this afternoon which focused on the need to share information and strategy, with NI asking for clarity on access to UK reserve for PPE, NI grasping for ventilators. In terms of test. NI ramping up in house testing but issue is we are doubling up on same equipment with the UK ramp up. Agreement by all nations on the need to come up to a shared position on prioritisation for testing and PPE (DHSC have asked DA's for their views on a testing approach paper by COP today) with Thursday's Healthcare MIG to focus on PPE prioritisation.

Comms - The Cabinet Office is compiling a bid for comms campaign funding relating to CV-19, and the NIO will input a top-line bid tomorrow, including for research and insight. DHSC is planning another phase of "Stay at Home" ads across the UK, which have been run past NICS. The Executive's advertising campaign launched with TV ads on Monday and they are planning an all-household maildrop to complement that of UKG. We also expect DoH NI to issue guidance to funeral directors on managing excess deaths, as the PHE advice is published today. A joint statement was issued following the Quad meeting between SoSNI, the Tánaiste, FM and dFM.

Economy - Engagement with DfT continues to ensure a tolerable minimum connection between NI and GB is maintained at the height of disruption. Hauliers bringing vital supplies from GB are no longer able to secure return loads due to the increasing shut down of NI manufacturing operations - DfT/NIO working with NI Executive to find a resolution. Some companies have highlighted that they are not covered by any of the government interventions, which may result in some NI companies falling through the cracks - HMT are aware of this issue and are investigating what can be done.

Legislation - The Coronavirus (Retention of Fingerprints and DNA Profiles in the Interests of National Security) Regulations will be made later this week. The Regulations apply in respect of fingerprints or DNA profiles that are retained under certain counter-terrorism provisions, or that may otherwise be relevant to the interests of national security. PSNI have been involved in the drafting to ensure that the regulations meet operational requirements. DoJ have also reviewed the draft and are content.

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NIO

Resource	Critical Business
<p>NIO Figures for 20 March</p> <p>Working in the office / travelling 4 (8) Working at home 169 (164) Self Isolating - symptoms - still working 1(1) Family Isolating - no symptoms - still working 10(11) Self Isolating - confirmed - still working 0 (0) Sick - Covid 1(1) Sick- other 0(0) Special Leave 1 (1) Other leave / NWD 5(8)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both sites remain open; Prime Minister's announcement last Monday evening reinforced need to work from home. Those working in office continue to be significantly reduced with corresponding rise in numbers working at home. Easter leave commitments will be reviewed to ensure critical business continues HR working on shift patterns and allowances as well as absence returns to Cabinet Office; C3 shifts are priority work-in-progress Ongoing work on new starter arrangements 	<p>Human Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Impact Assessment completed and has been submitted to PUS and SofS Process to move staff into priority areas has begun, with retraining taking place All DDs have completed an assessment of critical business, along with those tasks where office requirement remains First tranche of staff moves now complete Keyworker guidance issued in NI, and process underway SofS has now signed off prioritisation; this has been issued to DDs SSCL moving to email only service <p>IT/Networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network capacity will continue to be monitored with IT Assist to ensure business continuity; major work took place on w/e, with 5Gbps live on Tuesday evening Covid-19 Hub is live on Intranet, with NIO Social page Guidance is being prepared for use of Zoom/Hangouts <p>Emergency Response Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NI Hub is live ERT full will continue to meet weekly alongside two BDG-specific sub meetings <p>Estates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HG is closing one entrance; guidance to follow on intranet

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Forward Look

PM C-19 Strategy

- Wednesday 1st April:: [TBC] Update on randomised control trial and treatment regime, and availability of drugs being trialled [CMO and DHSC]
- Thursday 2nd April: : [TBC] Bed capacity in NHS hospitals, including regional breakdown and all beds: ventilation, oxygenation [NHS]
- Friday 3rd April: y: [TBC] Testing update: demand/supply, ramping up workers, wider population testing

C-19 Strategy (O) - CabSec chaired

- Wednesday 1st April: Cab Sec focus items: [TBC] Schools / key workers (following GPSMIG item on 31/3) [DfE]; Resourcing of the frontline - Deep dive into resourcing of key public services (prison and probation, DWP, police) [MoJ, DWP, HO, etc]
- Thursday 2nd April: Cab Sec focus items: Death Management (following GPSMIG item on 1/4) [CCS]; Shielding update [DHSC]
- **Friday TBC**

International MIG:

- international engagement script (FCO), iii) support to vulnerable countries (DfID), and iv) forward look for this week. No other TOs, or the DAs in attendance.
- Tuesday 31st March: FCO convening a meeting with DA ministers and TO SoS's to discuss i) Repatriation, ii) Ferries/ports, iii) Supply chain management and ventilators. Minister Walker will attend for the NIO. It is not yet confirmed which Minister will attend from the NIE.

Healthcare MIG:

- Thursday: Coordinating with Devolved Administrations; PPE prioritisation (DAs invited)

Public Services MIG

- Wednesday 1st April:: Children in care and vulnerable children [DfE, HO]; Update on school provision [DfE] **focuses on provision over Easter holiday**; Update on proposed package to support agriculture industry [DEFRA, HMT]
- Thursday 2nd April:: Update on Parliamentary Resilience [CO]; LA and LRF preparedness plans [MHCLG]; [TBC] Prioritisation of LA services [MHCLG]
- Friday 3rd April:: [TBC] Support for non-shielded socially and financially vulnerable people [MHCLG];
- Saturday 4th:: Forward look **core group only**
- **Economic Summit UKG - DA Perm Sec (TBC) - Week commencing 30 March (DfE Perm.Sec Mike Brennan & HOCS will attend)**

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