

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

BY EMAIL

To: All NI Departments through the Civil
Contingencies Group, for onward distribution to
all public authorities

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Date: 26 February 2020

Dear Colleagues

**CORONAVIRUS: (A) KEY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVICE
(B) ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES**

- 1 This letter updates the advice given in my letter of 6 February to all NI Departments and their public authorities, to reflect the recent changes in the case definition including reference to northern Italy. This letter supersedes the letter of 6 February. The purpose is to enable all NI Executive Departments and public authorities to prepare to respond to any and all potential eventualities arising from the current novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. It is essential that all Departments are assured that proportionate, appropriate and efficient arrangements are in place that are consistent with the key public health messages about novel coronavirus.
- 2 Each NI Department is asked to ensure that the letter is distributed to each public authority that they sponsor, including schools.

Coronavirus: key facts

- 3 Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some of which cause illness in people, ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as MERS and SARS. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. The 2019 novel Coronavirus strain, now officially designated COVID-19 by the World Health Organisation, is a strain not previously seen in humans. On 31 December 2019 Chinese authorities notified the WHO of an outbreak of viral pneumonia in Wuhan City. The virus has crossed the species barrier and we assume it has come from infected animals at a seafood and wildlife market in Wuhan. On 30 January 2020 the WHO designated the 2019-nCoV outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. In response the UK CMOs advised that governments should raise the risk in the UK from low to moderate in order that all governments could plan for all eventualities.

- 4 Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.
- 5 The majority of the cases to date have been in Wuhan and mainland China. Before the outbreak there were three direct flights from Wuhan to London Heathrow per week. These have now been suspended by the Chinese authorities. Direct flights from other parts of China land at Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester. British Airways and Virgin Atlantic have suspended all direct flights to and from mainland China. There are no direct flights between China and Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. As this is an evolving situation travel from other countries may also become relevant.

Coronavirus: public health advice for returning travellers

- 6 The following advice has been prepared for the benefit of any individual who may be concerned about the risk of contracting coronavirus. It is based on the advice of the UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies and has been adopted by the UK Chief Medical Officers. This is highly precautionary advice intended to limit the potential spread of infection. This is a fast-changing situation and the list of affected areas will be kept under review. Updated advice will be issued as necessary.

**Key public health advice for returning travellers:
position at 26 February 2020**

1. Anyone who has travelled to the UK from mainland China, Thailand, Japan, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia or Macau in the last 14 days, and who is experiencing cough or fever or shortness of breath should stay indoors and self-isolate and contact their GP who will arrange testing or if a medical emergency, call 999 and inform call handler about their recent travel, even if symptoms are mild.
2. Across the UK, public health professionals are carrying out enhanced monitoring of direct flights from these areas. Passengers will be told how to report any symptoms they develop during the flight, at the time of arrival, or after leaving the airport.
3. These areas have been identified because of the volume of air travel from affected areas, understanding of other travel routes and the number of reported cases. This list will be kept under review.

4. If any individual has returned from the following specific areas **since February 19**, they are being advised to call the dedicated Covid-19 helpline on 0300 200 7885 and stay indoors and avoid contact with other people even if they do not have symptoms:
- Iran
 - Specific lockdown areas in Northern Italy as designated by the Government of Italy
 - Special care zones in South Korea as designated by the Government of the Republic of South Korea
 - Hubei province (returned in the past 14 days)
5. If any individual has returned from the areas listed below **since February 19th** and develops symptoms, however mild, they should stay indoors at home and avoid contact with other people immediately and self-isolate and contact their GP who will arrange testing or if a medical emergency, call 999 and inform call handler about their recent travel. **They do not need to follow this advice if they have no symptoms.**
- Northern Italy (defined by a line above, and not including, Pisa, Florence and Rimini),
 - Vietnam
 - Cambodia
 - Laos
 - Myanmar

7 Up-to-date information and advice can be found at

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/advice-2019-ncov-novel-coronavirus>
and
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>.

Coronavirus: actions to be taken by public authorities

8 The Department of Health (NI) and other NI Departments have received queries from a range of public authorities and other sources about what action they should take in response to the 2019-nCoV outbreak. The Department of Health is closely monitoring the outbreak as it develops.

At this stage the advice to public authorities in general is unchanged since my letter of 6 February:

those public authorities that already have contingency plans for responding to infectious diseases, such as pandemic influenza, should ensure that all relevant staff are acquainted with those plans.

- 9 **No other action is recommended at this time to public authorities in general.**
- 10 If this advice needs to change, consideration will be given to invoking the NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA) for multi-agency coordination.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Medical Officer

cc The Executive Office
Health Gold
Health Silver