

Government on verge of destroying own plan 3 days after publication – LVA

Government and NPHEt practising “pick and mix approach” to national strategy

No correlation between HPSC data on outbreaks which show zero open outbreaks in pubs and NPHEt advice

The Government is on the verge of destroying their own plan only three days after they published it, according to the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA). The LVA were speaking in reaction to media reports that the Government are to limit pubs that serve food and restaurants to outdoor seating only, when they adjust the regional restrictions for Dublin.

This would mean that most of Dublin would be on Level 3, pubs that serve food and restaurants would be on Level 4 and non food pubs will be on Level 5.

Under the Government's Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021 Plan for Living with COVID-19, it is stated on Page 12 that in Level 3 there will be "Additional restrictions for indoor dining" for bars, cafes and restaurants, while Level 4 specifies "Take away food or delivery. No indoor dining." The same page also states that 'wet bars' can remain open at Levels 2, 3 and 4 – it is only at Level 5 that they are limited to takeaway or delivery only as will be the case following the Government's announcement they can't 'reopen'.

In light of the inconsistencies of approach, the LVA has accused NPHEt and Government of undertaking "pick and mix approach to the new national strategy which renders it meaningless".

The LVA also pointed to the lack of correlation between the NPHEt advice focusing on the hospitality sector and the latest outbreak data published by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC). The HPSC data shows there were zero open outbreaks associated with pubs and only 5 since the crisis began. In the case of restaurant and cafes there are 8 open cases but only 9 during the crisis. This compares to 61 open outbreaks in other workplaces (107 outbreaks in total) and 537 open outbreaks in private houses (2,077 outbreaks in total).

"If the Government proceeds with this and limits pubs and restaurants in Dublin to outdoor seating only, effectively they will have destroyed their own plan within 3 days of publishing it," said Donall O'Keeffe, Chief Executive of the LVA. "They said this new plan was to offer the country and businesses certainty. At the announcement they said the country was at Level 2 but they were putting the non food pubs of Dublin into Level 5 by keeping them closed. Now it looks like they are about to move most of Dublin to Level 3 but the pubs and restaurants will be put in Level 4.

"Effectively the Government and NPHEt are adopting a pick and mix approach to the new national strategy which renders it meaningless. How is Irish society meant to function if the levels outlined in this plan are disregarded by it own authors within a matter of days?

"We would also seek clarity as to why NPHEt and the Government are continuing to take action against the hospitality sector when the latest HPSC data clearly shows this isn't where the problem lies. There are zero open outbreaks in pubs. Compare that with the number of outbreaks in other workplaces or private houses. Yet it is pubs and restaurants who have abided by the regulations since the outset of this crisis which are the focus of additional restrictions. On what basis does that approach make sense? They are doing all they can to keep the pubs closed by default.

"At some point is NPHEt going to be asked to justify these recommendations? Are they going to be allowed to continue to advocate the most draconian approach in the EU and it is just accepted with limited critique? Or is NPHEt the emperor's new clothes which can't be questioned? NPHEt has an immense level

of power in this country at the moment. Surely if they are going to wield this level of influence and inflict damage of this level to certain sectors, then they should be held to account?" Mr. O'Keefe concluded.