

Video Conference on COVID-19
22/4/2020

Attendance:

Minister Harris, Secretary General, CMO, Ms Lonergan
HSE Chair, HSE CEO, HSE COO

Introduction: The HSE Chair paid tribute to the leadership on COVID-19 being demonstrated by the Minister, CMO and the Department. The Minister thanked the Chair and said he was deeply appreciative of the incredible work the HSE is doing at this time and its considerable achievements in very short timeframes.

Overall COVID-19 Response: The Minister said that NPHET is the singular mechanism for ensuring integrated and rapid response to the pandemic. It is based on best international practice and the model previously used by the State for other major public health threats. Its membership provides for joint advice and health services decision making based upon integrated consideration of policy and operations. The CMO, as chair of NPHET, outlined the procedures used in real-time for recording the text of decisions prior to communication. The CEO provided feedback on behalf of HSE participants. It was confirmed that there is ongoing openness to strengthening processes, including feedback from HSE participants in NPHET or changes to HSE participation and the following was agreed:

- NPHET members will ensure that they continue to provide input to the procedure for the recording of NPHET decisions to ensure collective agreement on the detail and the nature of communication requirements.
- As is regularly the case, there will be a procedure after a NPHET meeting whereby the Minister and SG are briefed by the CMO and the HSE CEO briefed by a senior representative on NPHET.
- The draft letter and actions, to be communicated to the HSE, from the NPHET meeting, would be confirmed with the relevant HSE nominee on the group, prior to circulation to the HSE and/or outward communication.
- Once per week the participants on the call will meet to ensure collective understanding and alignment on strategy, as part of the continuous ongoing engagement in relation to COVID-19 response.
- The SG and CMO will provide the HSE Board with an early briefing on the output of the model and the implications for the public health strategy.

Testing and Tracing: The work underway within the HSE to finalise a scaling up of testing and tracing will see a plan finalised by the end of the week. The SG and CMO will engage closely with the CEO and Ms Niamh O'Beirne so that the plan entails the key elements required to meet public health requirements and appropriate measures for monitoring. This will obviously be subject to the required funding to support implementation.

PPE: The CEO outlined the progress made to date in the context of global supply challenges. The extended timeframe applying and the range of sectors requiring continued supplies will need to inform medium term procurement arrangements.

Long Term Care: The extensive work underway to support the long term care sector was reviewed, in the context of the overriding priority to interrupt the transmission of COVID-19. The COO outlined the arrangements in place and the range of supports the HSE is seeking to make available.

Private Hospitals: The CEO outlined the priority attaching to the fullest utilisation of these facilities in a situation where, thankfully, COVID-19 demand has not exceeded capacity constraints within public hospitals. There is a strong focus within the HSE now in directing non-COVID work to these facilities and close engagement with the Department is continuing.

Non-COVID Health and Social Care Needs: The need to manage these needs to the greatest extent possible over a protracted period was agreed as a key challenge for the remainder of the year. The recommendations of the WHO for planning to maintain essential health service delivery for other needs and the need for ongoing surveillance and monitoring was noted.

Learning: The HSE Chair said consideration would be given to capturing learning from the management of the crisis so that it would be available in the future. It was also agreed that the extensive innovation rapidly undertaken, much of it in line with Sláintecare, was a dividend that should be harnessed for the future and the Department and the HSE should seek to capture and support this innovation.