

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



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnstríe O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

**HSS(MD) 14/2020**

**FOR ACTION**

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health and Social Care Board/HSC Trusts/ NIAS

GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward distribution to practice staff)

OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

**PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST**

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 14/2020

Date: 13 March 2020

Dear Colleague

**Novel Coronavirus: Advice for HSC in Northern Ireland**

***Action Required***

Chief Executives must ensure that this information is drawn to the attention of all clinical staff to enable them to respond accordingly

The HSCB must ensure that this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and OOH facilities, General Dental Practitioners, Optometrists and Community Pharmacists immediately.

COVID-19 is circulating in the community so we are now in the delay phase of our response to COVID-19. As a result the case definition has changed.

From today the public are being advised to stay at home (self-isolate) if they have the following symptoms:

- a. A new continuous cough
- OR
- b. High temperature (of  $\geq 37.8$  degrees centigrade or higher)

Travel and contact history are no longer part of the case definition. This new advice is available to the public on: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>.

People are being advised that they you do not need to seek medical advice before self-isolating. However if they have underlying medical conditions; or if their symptoms worsen during home isolation; or are no better after 7 days they should contact [their](#) GP or GP Out of Hours. For a medical emergency dial 999. Self-isolation can end on day 8 after the onset of symptoms if clinical improvement has occurred and they have been afebrile for 2 days.

## Testing

Testing will generally not be offered unless people are admitted to hospital.

Clinicians should be alert to the possibility of atypical presentations in patients who are immunocompromised.

It is important that laboratory testing capacity is used appropriately to guide the public health and clinical management of this response. **Asymptomatic individuals should generally not be tested.**

## Further information

The most up to date guidance relating to COVID-19 can be found on the Public Health England GOV.UK website accessible at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

We expect the health service to be exceptionally busy in the coming days and weeks.

**Infection prevention and control measures whilst awaiting test results, including isolation and cohorting of patients, should be implemented in line with your Trust or HSC organisation's infection prevention control (IPC) plans and protocols.**

## Guidance for healthcare workers

- Healthcare workers should wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (aprons, gloves and a fluid repellent mask whilst assessing and treating patients; gowns, gloves, FFP3 masks and eye protection whilst performing aerosol generating procedures)
- Healthcare workers should follow the guidance for the general public and stay at home for 7 days if they develop symptoms in line with the definition above.
- Healthcare workers who come into contact with a patient with COVID-19 whilst not wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) can remain at work. If they display any symptoms of lower or upper-respiratory tract infection they must immediately stay at home for the duration of the illness or 7 days, whichever is longer.
- Current guidance is that healthcare workers do not need to be tested for COVID-19, prior to returning to work when symptom free.

The three important principles to bear in mind in hospital settings are to:

- **Identify** possible cases as soon as possible
- **Isolate or cohort** to prevent transmission to other patients and staff
- Avoid direct physical contact unless wearing **appropriate personal protective equipment**

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely



**DR MICHAEL McBRIDE**  
Chief Medical Officer

## Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)  
Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency  
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency  
Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)  
Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts  
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Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health and Social Care Board (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)  
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Joe Brogan, Assistant Director of Integrated Care, HSCB  
This letter

This letter is available on the Department of Health website at  
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>