

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride and
the Chief Scientific Advisor
Professor Ian Young**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 67/2020

For Action:

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health and Social
Care Board/HSC Trusts/NIAS
GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward
distribution to practice staff)
OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SQ

Tel: 028 9052 0563

Email: Michael.McBride@health-ni.gov.uk

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PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleagues

MINIMISING RISKS OF COVID-19 OUTBREAKS IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS

We thought it timely to write to colleagues to provide some advice based on the most up-to-date information available with regard to minimising the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in healthcare settings. During the first wave of the current pandemic a significant proportion of COVID-19 cases were related to nosocomial infection; indeed in some hospitals across the UK up to 40% of COVID-19 cases were nosocomial at some points in time, though fortunately this has not been the case in Northern Ireland to date.

Recently, we have seen the potential for hospital and healthcare associated outbreaks to impact on patients and staff in Northern Ireland, and we have seen how these outbreaks can significantly affect delivery of our services. There are already strong guidelines in place in relation to infection prevention and control, testing and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the context of patient facing activities, with a view to reducing transmission of the SARs-COV-2 virus. However, evidence from the first wave of this pandemic suggests that significant transmission can and has occurred in the context of interactions between healthcare staff when they are not engaged in patient facing activities.

We acknowledge how challenging a time this has been for all healthcare staff, and we extend our sincere thanks to all staff for their hard work during the ongoing pandemic. It is extremely challenging to maintain our guard at all times and this may inadvertently result in lapses in maintaining the recommended precautions in social interactions and other settings across our health and care facilities. It is therefore particularly important that we all remain vigilant in areas such as changing rooms, staff rooms, dining rooms and as they engage in conversations or interact in

corridors and other settings when they are not engaged in direct patient facing activities.

The aim should be for all staff to maintain a social distance of 2 metres when possible, to wear face coverings when this is not possible, and to ensure they adhere to all other infection control and public health measures. Further details on the use of face coverings in Health and Social Care facilities is available at HSS(MD)58/2020 link - <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hss-md-58-2020.pdf>. Staff must also be aware that this vigilance should extend to off duty activities in a social context and during travel to and from work, as risk of transmission between staff remains the same regardless of setting.

It is vitally important that we all continue to strive to set an example to the wider public in relation to prevention of the spread of COVID-19. Adhering to this guidance and ensuring we diligently implement good practice will benefit not only the staff themselves, but also our patients and the wider public as we head into the winter period.

Yours sincerely



DR MICHAEL McBRIDE
Chief Medical Officer



Professor Ian Young
Chief Scientific Advisor

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