



BY EMAIL ONLY

Mr. Damien McCallion
Chief Operations Officer
Health Service Executive
Dr Steeven's Hospital
Dublin 8

3rd August 2023

Re: Rising cases of COVID-19 impacting on hospitals and care homes: August 2nd 2023

Dear Damien,

Our National Health Protection Service (NHPS) have reported rising levels of COVID-19 infection over the past few weeks, now impacting particularly on hospitals and care homes.

As of 1st August:

- **13 hospital outbreaks were reported in week 30 compared to 6 in the previous week.** Some outbreaks have been large e.g. Kerry hospital had 29 confirmed linked cases across multiple wards.
- There were **12 outbreaks in Long-term Care Facilities (LTCFs) in week 30 vs 7 in week 29.**
- Data from the HSE Performance Management Improvement Unit (PMIU) COVID-19 system showed that at 8am on **Tuesday 1 August, there were 271 patients in acute hospitals that had COVID-19 infection compared to 58 one month previously on the July 1 2023.**

This is against a background of increased community transmission. Indicators which had been trending downwards during May and June 2023, began to increase again from the end of June:

- In week 30, 422 confirmed COVID-19 cases were reported to the Computerised Infectious Disease Reporting system (CIDR), an increase of 51.8% compared to week 29 when 278 confirmed COVID-19 cases notified.
- Of these there were 201 hospitalised cases, which is a 34% increase from week 29 when 150 hospitalised cases were reported on CIDR.
- A similar trend is occurring in the UK.

No significant increase in infection severity has been observed in Ireland in recent weeks. The number of patients in ICU that had COVID-19 infection did increase slightly during July, but remains overall low:

- On August 1 there were 9 patients in ICU with COVID-19 compared to 3 patients on July 1 2023.



In previous waves, if COVID-19 case numbers increase substantially in the community, some level of increased hospital and ICU admissions is likely to follow. We have seen in previous waves that increased circulation in the community results in an increase in patients with COVID-19 in hospital, and an increase in outbreaks in hospitals, nursing homes and other healthcare settings.

No new variant of SARS-CoV-2 has been identified to account for this increase. We have seen waves of increased COVID-19 activity occur, even in the absence of new virus variants, every few months since the start of 2022. There are likely to be several factors driving these waves such increased indoor mixing, increased international travel, and waning immunity. To date, waves during the summer period have generally been of lower magnitude than those in the winter period.

The HSE are monitoring the situation closely, informed by our NHPS, and preparing for possible further increases in COVID-19 circulation, along with other respiratory viruses, in the autumn and winter as seen in previous years. We have also been looking at the experiences in the Southern Hemisphere to guide our planning for our coming winter. The Australian winter was characterised by relatively modest COVID-19 transmission but more than usual pressure on the system from influenza infections that presented earlier than usual.

Given the current situation, we reiterate the need for hospitals and care homes to continue review their infection prevention and control plans and to apply current COVID-19 guidance provided at the HPSC website [New/Updated Guidance - Health Protection Surveillance Centre \(hpsc.ie\)](https://www.hpsc.ie). Health & Care Workers (H+CWs) should follow current advice if they have any symptoms of COVID-19, even mild ones, including advice on testing and staying away from work according to guidance.

In order to protect themselves and their patients and vulnerable people in their care, **H&CWs should ensure they take up the offer the Autumn COVID-19 booster and seasonal flu vaccine when offered** later this year.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide updated advice and guidance accordingly, which will found at the HPSC website (see link above).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colm Henry', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Dr. Colm Henry
Chief Clinical Officer