



Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer,
Department of Health,
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
D02 XW14

31st March 2022

CC: Mr Stephen Donnelly, Minister for Health; Mr Paul Reid, Chief Executive Officer of the Health Service Executive; Mr Ciaran Devane, Chair of HSE Board

Dear Dr Holohan,

The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation and the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine representing nurses in Emergency Departments and overcrowded wards and doctors working in Emergency Departments are jointly calling for the assistance of your office in an attempt to curb the spread of COVID-19. Higher rates of infection are causing higher hospital admissions. Our hospitals are overwhelmed and staff need real assistance.

Since the mask mandate was lifted on February 28th, 11,020 patients have been without a bed in our hospitals and as of this morning 1,610 patients are in hospital with COVID with over 5,000 healthcare workers sick with COVID.

In addition to the very serious patient risks, there are very significant risks for medical and nursing staff who are now exhausted from being on the front line, dealing with wave-upon-wave of patients diagnosed with COVID and the other drivers of increased attendances, including a significant increase in acute mental health emergencies and increased paediatric attendance, while dealing with their own personal and family anxieties.

The problem of overcrowding at this level is not a new phenomenon in our hospitals - medical professionals have been sounding the alarm for a long time now. Immediate stronger public health measures are needed - not doing so and abandoning the hospitals to the inevitable will lead to unnecessary preventable higher levels of illness requiring hospital admission and sadly, for some, a fatal outcome.

You are aware that we are entering a whole new accelerated phase of this virus. As of March 27th, 89,432 of the pandemic's total 1,442,877 cases had occurred within the past 2 weeks, meaning 6.2% of COVID infections had occurred in approximately 1-2% of the pandemic's timeframe.

Both of our organisations are calling on you to issue clear advice to Government. Public health measures must be revisited, particularly the simple ones: mask-wearing in indoor and congregated settings and working from home.

The INMO and the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine view the circumstances facing us as frontline workers as we try to provide care as incredibly dangerous and inhumane for many. We are therefore calling on the Government and public health teams to review measures ahead of the peak of the latest wave of the COVID virus. Wearing masks and working from home will assist. We accept that, of themselves, these measures will not end the spread but they will lessen the burden of

infection, reduce cross infection and may help ameliorate the intolerable pressure on our hospitals. Mandating these measures is now, in our shared view, a matter of urgency.

Hospitals are currently not safe for patients or for staff because of the level of overcrowding and COVID infection levels. We need clear and coherent public health advice from Government and senior public health officials. The public need to be made aware of why we need them to once again step up to the plate in order to protect those who are working on our frontlines.

We are therefore urging you now to make a decision to reintroduce these relatively simple public health measures, at least for a short period.

We are available to discuss our request with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Phil Ní Sheaghdha
General Secretary
Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation

Fergal Hickey
President
Irish Association of Emergency Medicine