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Public health measures needed as a matter of urgency – INMO & IAEM

*Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation and Irish Association for Emergency Medicine
Press Statement
31st March 2022*

The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation representing nurses in Emergency Departments and overcrowded wards and the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine representing doctors working in Emergency Departments are jointly calling for Government assistance to curb the spread of COVID-19. Higher rates of infection are causing high rates of hospital admission. Hospitals are overwhelmed and staff need real assistance.

This comes as over 10,000 patients have been without a bed since the mask mandate was lifted on February 28th and over 1,601 patients are in hospital currently 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 admissions, while dealing with their own personal and family anxieties.

[We are now calling on Government, public health officials and HSE senior management to take action:](#)

- Public health measures must be revisited, particularly the simple ones: mask-wearing in indoor and congregated settings and working from home
- There should be adherence to the advice from the World Health Organisation

From HPSC figures it is clear that:

- 89,432 of the pandemic's total 1,442,877 cases had occurred within the 2 weeks prior to 27th March, meaning that 6.2% of COVID infections had occurred in approximately 1-2% of the pandemic's timeframe.
- 58% of all COVID deaths in Ireland have been linked to outbreaks, with over 90% of those linked to outbreaks in healthcare facilities.

INMO General Secretary, **Phil Ní Sheaghda** said:

“The INMO and our colleagues in the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine have come together today to call 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, they will not stop the spread, but have and will reduce intensity of infection and reduce cross infection. Mandating these measures is now a matter of urgency.

“Predictable overcrowding in winter, mixed with higher community spread of an airborne contagious infection means decision-makers are not in the dark. Abandoning our public acute hospitals is a decision that Government cannot make, this would be the wrong decision for patients and the wrong one for staff.

“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.”

Karen McGowan INMO President and an Emergency Department nurse said:

“When senior clinicians from a medical and nursing perspective sound the alarm to this extent someone must stop and pay attention. Between both of our organisations, we have been calling on Government and senior public health officials to act when it comes to implementing public health advice. Our members currently feel like they are getting no support and are being left to deal with the worst of this virus by themselves. If staff are saying this is how unsafe it is, well, then everybody can’t remain silent.

“The Government cannot put their heads in the sand, COVID is still a very dangerous and highly transmissible virus that over 1,600 in hospitals are infected with the virus. Our members feel like they have been thrown to the wolves. They were already burned out after two years of COVID but now we are back to the bad old days of serious hospital overcrowding, by the time this month is over we will have had the worst March since the INMO began counting trolleys in 2006. Not only do we have record overcrowding, if the trends continue as predicted then we will have record levels of staff out sick from COVID.

Irish Association of Emergency Medicine President, **Mr Fergal Hickey** said:

“The situation in Irish hospitals at present is the worst that many of my colleagues and I have seen in our careers. The situation at present is intolerable for all who work in our hospitals. Our hospitals have been hanging together by a thread of goodwill of staff but that is about to snap.

“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 preventable unnecessary higher levels of illness requiring hospital admission and, sadly, for some a fatal outcome. Hospitals are currently not safe for patients or for staff because of the level of overcrowding and COVID infection levels.

“It has been repeatedly and robustly proven over recent decades that ED crowding results in an excess 30-day mortality for all patients and the recently published UK research confirms that delay to admission is, of itself, a cause of avoidable mortality to the patient subjected to this long wait, irrespective of overall levels of crowding.”