

**Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Expert Advisory Group Meeting  
(NPHE COVID-19 Support)**

**Meeting no. 20 : Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2021 at 11:00**

**(Zoom/video conference)**

**(DRAFT) MINUTES**

**Attendance:**

<b>Chair</b>	Dr Conor Teljeur	Chief Scientist, HTA Directorate, HIQA
<b>Members via video conference</b>	Prof Karina Butler	Consultant Paediatrician and Infectious Diseases Specialist, Children's Health Ireland & Chair of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee
	Dr Jeff Connell	Assistant Director, UCD National Virus Reference Laboratory, University College Dublin
	Ms Sinead Creagh	Laboratory Manager at Cork University Hospital & Academy of Clinical Science and Laboratory Medicine
	Dr Ellen Crushell	Consultant Paediatrician, Dean, Faculty of Paediatrics, Royal College of Physicians of Ireland & Co-National Clinical Lead, HSE Paediatric/Neonatology Clinical Programme
	Dr John Cuddihy	Specialist in Public Health Medicine & Interim Director, HSE- Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC)
	Dr David Hanlon	General Practitioner & National Clinical Advisor and Group Lead, Primary Care/Clinical Strategy and Programmes, HSE
	Dr Patricia Harrington	Deputy Director, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Prof Mary Keogan	Consultant Immunologist, Beaumont Hospital & Clinical Lead, National Clinical Programme for Pathology, HSE
	Ms Sarah Lennon	Executive Director, SAGE Advocacy
	Mr Andrew Lynch	Business Manager, Office of the National Clinical Advisor and Group Lead - Mental Health, HSE
	Prof Paddy Mallon	Consultant in Infectious Diseases, St Vincent's University Hospital & HSE Clinical Programme for Infectious Diseases
	Dr Gerry McCarthy	Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Cork University Hospital & National Clinical Lead, HSE Clinical Programme for Emergency Medicine
	Dr Grainne McNally**	Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit HSE; Occupational Medicine Fellow in Physician Health and Wellbeing, Royal College of Physicians Ireland
	Dr Michele Meagher	Medical Officer, Health Products Regulatory Authority
	Dr John Murphy	Consultant Paediatrician & Co-National Clinical Lead, HSE Paediatric/Neonatology Clinical Programme
	Dr Margaret B. O'Sullivan	Specialist in Public Health Medicine, Department of Public Health, HSE South & Chair, National Zoonoses Committee
	Dr Sarah M. O'Brien	Specialist in Public Health Medicine, Office of National Clinical Advisor & Group Lead (NCAGL) for Chronic Disease
	Dr Gerard O'Connor	Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Mater Misericordiae University Hospital HSE Clinical Programme for Emergency Medicine
	Prof Susan Smith	Professor of Primary Care Medicine, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
	Dr Patrick Stapleton	Consultant Microbiologist, UL Hospitals Group, Limerick & Irish Society of Clinical Microbiologists
	Dr Cillian de Gascun	Consultant Virologist & Director of the National Virus Reference Laboratory, University College Dublin

<b>In attendance</b>	Prof Philip Nolan*	President, Maynooth University & Chair of Irish Epidemiological Modelling Advisory Group (IEMAG)
	Dr Abigail Collins	Consultant in Public Health Medicine, HSE
	Dr Louise Hendrick	Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine
	Ms Heather Eames	HTA Intern, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Dr Susan Spillane	Head of Assessment, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Dr Helen O'Donnell	Senior HTA Analyst, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Dr Katie O'Brien	Health Services Researcher, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Dr Kieran Walsh	Senior HTA Analyst, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Dr Laura Comber	Senior HTA Analyst, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Ms Natasha Broderick	HTA Analyst, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Dr Louise Larkin	HTA Programme Manager, HTA Directorate, HIQA
<b>Secretariat</b>	Ms Debra Spillane	PA to Dr Máirín Ryan, HIQA
<b>Apologies</b>	Ms Avril Aylward	IVD Operations Manager, Medical Devices Department, Health Products Regulatory Authority
	Dr Eibhlín Connolly	Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health
	Prof Máire Connolly	Specialist Public Health Adviser, Department of Health and Professor of Global Health and Development, National University of Ireland, Galway
	Prof Martin Cormican	Consultant Microbiologist & National Clinical Lead, HSE Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control Team
	Dr Lorraine Doherty	National Clinical Director Health Protection, HSE- Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC)
	Ms Josephine Galway	National Director of Nursing Infection Prevention Control and Antimicrobial Resistance AMRIC Division of Health Protection and Surveillance Centre
	Dr James Gilroy	Medical Officer, Health Products Regulatory Authority
	Dr Derval Igoe	Specialist in Public Health Medicine, HSE- Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC)
	Dr Siobhán Kennelly	Consultant Geriatrician & National Clinical & Advisory Group Lead, Older Persons, HSE
	Dr Deirdre Mulholland	Consultant in Public Health, National Clinical Lead for Knowledge, Evidence and Quality Improvement, Office of the National Clinical Director of Health Protection
	Dr Des Murphy	Consultant Respiratory Physician & Clinical Lead, National Clinical Programme for Respiratory Medicine, HSE
	Ms Áine Lynch*	Chief Executive Officer, National Parents Council Primary
	Ms Michelle O'Neill	Deputy Director, HTA Directorate, HIQA
	Dr Michael Power	Consultant Intensivist, Beaumont Hospital & Clinical Lead, National Clinical Programme for Critical Care, HSE
	Dr Máirín Ryan	Director of Health Technology Assessment (HTA) & Deputy Chief Executive Officer, HIQA

\* Ad hoc member for this meeting only, \*\* Alternate member for Dr Lynda Sisson

## Proposed Matters for Discussion:

### 1. Welcome

Dr Conor Teljeur acting as Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies recorded as per above.

### 2. Conflicts of Interest

No new conflicts raised in advance of this meeting.

### 3. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting of 11.08.2021 were approved as an accurate reflection of the discussions involved.

### 4. Work Programme

The group was provided with an overview of the current status of the work programme including:

No.	Review Questions	Status of work	NPHET date
1	Face masks in children (update)	For discussion	25 Aug 2021
2	Review of PPE Models	Ongoing	Not going to NPHET (AMRIC 3 September 2021)
3	Duration of vaccine protective immunity	Ongoing	23 Sept 2021
4	Reinfection rate post infection with SARS-CoV-2 (update)	Commences 7 September 2021	7 Oct 2021
	Nursing home analysis	Ongoing	
	UNICOV	Ongoing	
	Database	Ongoing - weekly	
	Public health guidance: - vulnerable groups - LTCFs	Ongoing -biweekly -monthly	

### 5. Presentations on key factors to consider for 'Lowering the age for the application of mask wearing requirements' facemask use in children update (Dr Susan Spillane, Dr Cillian De Gascun, Prof Philip Nolan, Dr Abbey Collins, Dr Louise Hendrick) (*for discussion*)

A number of presentations were delivered to provide updates on the evidence with respect to issues relating to this policy question, including the:

- importance of variants of concern, and, specifically, the Delta variant, to SARS-CoV-2 transmission and to outcomes of COVID-19 in children
- epidemiological evidence regarding transmission in children
- evidence regarding the effectiveness of face masks in reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2, particularly among children
- consideration of potential benefits and harms that may be associated with the wearing of face masks by children
- acceptability of a face mask requirement to relevant stakeholders, including, for example, children, parents and teachers

- feasibility of a face mask requirement for younger children
- examples of international recommendations regarding the use of face masks by children
- contextual considerations.

## **6. Facilitated Discussion: 'Lowering the age for the application of mask wearing requirements' facemask use in children update (PH) *(for discussion)***

The COVID-19 Expert Advisory Group (EAG) engaged in a facilitated discussion based on the presentations described above in order to address the policy question under consideration. The following points were raised in respect of the findings of the presentations:

- Contextual factors related to the upcoming primary school reopening period were noted; the role of the Delta variant was highlighted and it was noted that the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in the general population is higher now than it was at any previous school reopening period during the pandemic. However it was also considered that the context is also different now due to, for example, widespread vaccination coverage in the adult population, but also easing of restrictions generally including evidence of increased travel and social contacts.
- The UK was confronted with the Delta variant at an earlier stage than Ireland, so there was a discussion regarding the applicability of UK schools outbreak data for the Irish context. It was clarified that the public health mitigation measures in place in schools and the wider community within the UK are quite different to those implemented in Ireland, and so direct comparisons are challenging.
- The clinical course of COVID-19 in children in the context of the Delta variant was clarified. Early experience with the Delta variant suggests there is no evidence of increased disease severity (including hospitalisations) in children, relative to previously circulating variants. High levels of community transmission are currently contributing to increased incidence of infection in children; therefore, the absolute risk of severe disease in children is higher now than previously observed.
- There was agreement that COVID-19 vaccine uptake should be actively encouraged in all eligible groups as this could confer protection against SARS-CoV-2 infection in young children who are not currently eligible for vaccination.
- The seroprevalence levels in children were queried. Estimates of prior infection levels in children were discussed in the context of potential under-ascertainment in this population. It was explained that seroprevalence data are unavailable for children within Ireland.
- The current guidance on exclusion from school for children who have any symptoms of COVID-19 (or who have household members that have symptoms) was discussed. There was agreement that the public health guidance outlining when children should be excluded from attending school should be clearly and consistently communicated.
- Various options for use of face masks by children were considered:
  - The potential for use of face masks by pupils in fifth and sixth classes in primary schools was suggested, as it was considered that such pupils would be capable of wearing face masks.
  - It was reiterated that the current guidance does not preclude the use of face masks by children aged less than 12 years.

- While out of scope for this advice document, the ongoing requirement for face masks by secondary school students was discussed, with a consensus that it was premature to consider whether revisions to current policy are warranted.
- It was suggested that there was a lack of clarity regarding the goal of the intervention; it was considered unclear whether use of face masks by children is intended to reduce infections (and therefore morbidity) specifically within children, or whether their use is intended to reduce the overall burden of infection within society.
- It was acknowledged that the Delta variant is causing considerable anxiety in the public due to its increased transmissibility. However it was noted that schools are heavily mitigated environments and while evidence to date is limited, there is no evidence that increased transmissibility translates to increased transmission within school or childcare settings. Given the evolving epidemiological situation it was considered prudent that the potential requirement for use of face masks in primary school-aged children should be kept under review. It was suggested that the evidence be reviewed six to eight weeks after the schools have fully reopened.

## **7. Presentation on 'Protocol for Duration of protective immunity following COVID-19 vaccination (efficacy and effectiveness) (HO'D) (for discussion)**

Item moved offline due to time constraints.

## **8. Presentation on 'Protocol – updated analysis of factors associated with outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 in nursing homes in Ireland' (LC) (for discussion)**

Item moved offline due to time constraints.

## **9. Meeting Close**

- a) Due to time constraints, members were asked to feedback any comments via email on Agenda items 7 and 8 on the protocols.
- b) Date of next meeting: 20 September 2021

The Chair thanked the EAG members for their time and contributions.

Meeting closed at 13:14