28 February 2020

COVID-19 update

The Public Health Agency (PHA) has completed the contact tracing process associated with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 and those requiring appropriate advice have been provided with it.

In addition, the agency will be moving to providing twice-weekly updates on the number of tests completed on individuals who meet the case definition. As of today, 93 tests have been completed, with 92 confirmed as negative and one as presumed positive.

Dr Jillian Johnston, Consultant in Health Protection at the PHA, said: "All stages of the individual's journey were identified and those who came into closest contact have been traced and contacted with public health advice and guidance.

"I would emphasise that members of the public who have travelled between Dublin and Belfast using public transport need not be concerned.

"Contact tracing is an effective and efficient method carried out by the PHA to help prevent the further spread of infections such as COVID-19.

"When a patient tests positive for an infectious disease, an interview is carried out with the patient to help identify those who they may have come into closest contact with, then a process begins by public health professionals to trace and communicate with those individuals.

"Once contact has been made, the appropriate advice can be given to these individuals based on whether they are at high risk, low risk or there is no risk.

"Regular contact is kept with those in the higher risk categories and if they experience any symptoms, appropriate medical intervention will take place.

"If there are any links to another country, the PHA works with its counterparts in those jurisdictions to enable appropriate investigations into potential contacts and actions to be undertaken.

"If the person being monitored does develop symptoms, they would be tested and provided the appropriate care.

"We would like to reiterate the effective measures we all can take to help stop the spread of coronavirus. Like seasonal flu, the same public health advice applies for COVID-19 (coronavirus) - if you cough or sneeze, use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose, throw it away carefully after use, and wash your hands.

"Once flu and similar infectious viruses begin to circulate, the main method that can prevent further spread is good personal hygiene. Washing your hands regularly will help prevent flu and other viruses spreading.

"If you do become unwell and suspect you may have been exposed to COVID-19, you should stay at home and phone your GP for advice.

"The Public Health Agency is continuing working with partners across the UK including Public Health England, as well as the Department of Health and health trusts in Northern Ireland, and the health service in the Republic of Ireland, on the ongoing global novel coronavirus response.

"Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common across the world. These viruses can cause mild symptoms ranging from a fever and cough to more serious conditions such as severe pneumonia, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties."

Information on coronavirus is available at www.pha.site/coronavirus