

**From the Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Michael McBride**

**HSS(MD) 4/2020**



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

**FOR ACTION**

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health and Social  
Care Board/HSC Trusts/ NIAS  
GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board  
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward  
distribution to practice staff)  
OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
BELFAST BT4 3SQ

Tel: 028 9052 0563

Email: [michael.mcbride@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:michael.mcbride@health-ni.gov.uk)

Your Ref:

Our Ref: HSS(MD) 4/2020

Date: 24 January 2020

**PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST**

Dear Colleague

**WUHAN NOVEL CORONAVIRUS - MESSAGE FOR ALL CLINICAL STAFF  
ENCOUNTERING PATIENTS WITH RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS  
ARRIVED FROM OVERSEAS**

***Action Required***

Chief Executives must ensure that this information is drawn to the attention of all clinical staff to enable them to respond accordingly

The HSCB must ensure that this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and OOH facilities immediately.

1. You will be aware of the evolving situation in China, where, as of 24 January 2020, it has been reported there are around 830 confirmed cases in China and 25 fatalities. The situation is fast moving and this and other figures in this letter are likely to have risen by the time you receive this correspondence, particularly as the Chinese New Year celebrations are imminent; which typically involves the mass movement of people both within and outside China and may amplify transmission.
2. The severity of the infections ranges from mild symptoms of upper respiratory tract infection (with or without fever) to fulminant pneumonia requiring hospitalisation and advanced respiratory support. However, most reported cases are at the mild end of the spectrum with no confirmed cases in the UK.

At the current time, if the novel coronavirus is seen in the UK, it is most likely to be in a traveler who has visited Wuhan City in China, although over time this is likely to widen to include other Chinese cities. To date, all cases detected outside China (currently 12) are in patients who have recently travelled to Wuhan. It is therefore essential that an accurate travel history is obtained from all patients with acute respiratory infections to help identify potential cases.

3. The attached pathway outlines the initial assessment questions to identify a patient who may require isolation and testing. All primary and secondary healthcare providers should make arrangements for such patients to be immediately identified and isolated according to the Public Health England guidance. The current patient pathway will be for assessment in airborne isolation in a secondary care facility, followed by testing and a period of isolation (at home or in hospital) whilst awaiting the results.

#### Advice for clinical staff

- Obtain an accurate travel history from all patients with acute respiratory infections to help identify potential cases
  - Primary care practices are asked to identify possible cases, isolate them immediately, and seek specialist advice from a microbiologist, virologist or infectious disease physician in their Trust. They are not expected to undertake any clinical assessment or sampling.
  - All secondary care facilities with airborne isolation capability are expected to assess possible cases of Wuhan novel coronavirus using appropriate isolation facilities. They should review the Public Health England guidance and ensure that they have considered how to operationalise this.
  - All secondary care facilities should be prepared to undertake sampling and transport samples to the Regional virus Laboratory at the Belfast Trust (this should be done in conjunction with advice from the duty virologist on call) as well as making arrangements for such patients to be identified immediately and managed in airborne isolation.
  - If the novel coronavirus is detected, the patient will be transferred to Ward 7A at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.
4. As more information about this infection becomes available, guidance will be updated. Please access the most recent version of guidelines – Public Health England, in collaboration with the NHS has published guidance covering:  
[the initial assessment and investigation of cases](#), [infection prevention and control and guidance](#), [guidance on diagnostics](#) and specific [interim guidance for primary care](#).
5. The four key principles to bear in mind in community settings are to:
    - **Identify** possible cases as soon as possible
    - **Isolate** to prevent transmission to other patients and staff

