

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister.

It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Department of Health

RESPONSE TO THE EMERGENCE OF CORONAVIRUS (2019 NCOV) — UPDATE

Published at 2.30 pm on Monday 3 February 2020

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): Further to my written statements to the Assembly of the 24 and 29 January I wanted to provide members with a further update on recent developments.

The novel coronavirus has unfortunately, as expected, continued to spread globally and on 30 January, the World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus as a global public health emergency of international concern. On the advice of the UK Chief Medical Officers the risk level in the UK has been raised from low to moderate and the Chief Medical Officer in Northern Ireland Dr Michael McBride, has issued further advice to clinical staff.

We have now also seen the first confirmed cases in the UK with two people testing positive in England. I understand both patients are well. The patients are receiving specialist NHS care, and tried and tested infection control procedures are being used to try and prevent further spread of the virus.

I want to reassure members that while the risk has been raised from low to moderate there is no cause for alarm and it does not mean we think the risk to individuals in the UK has changed at this stage, rather that we should plan for all eventualities.

As I have previously stated it is not unreasonable to assume that at some point we will have a positive case in Northern Ireland. We have been preparing for cases of novel coronavirus, we are used to managing infections and we have robust infection control measures in place to respond immediately. I have spoken to the First and deputy First Ministers and have been assured that all the necessary resources of Government will be available to help keep our people safe. I have updated my Executive colleagues at our meeting this morning and have their full support and commitment.

I am working with other UK Ministers to ensure we coordinate our planning. My Department continues to work closely with the relevant authorities and public health organisations across the UK and the Republic of Ireland as the outbreak in China develops to ensure we are ready to deal with the situation. The CMO has also been in regular contact with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland. This remains a rapidly evolving picture, with numbers of cases changing very frequently and as of 2 February the official PHE data shows 14,545 cases have been confirmed, of which 14,390 are in Mainland China. 305 people have died, with one of these deaths in the Philippines and the rest within China.

My priority as Minister is still to ensure all effective measures are in place within Northern Ireland and I will continue to provide further statements to the Assembly in due course.