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Statement from the National Public Health Emergency Team - Friday 21 May

Item Type	other
Citation	Ireland. Department of Health, National Public Health Emergency Team, 'Statement from the National Public Health Emergency Team - Friday 21 May', [other], Department of Health, 2021-05-21
Publisher	Department of Health
Rights	Y
Download date	2026-04-20 21:21:28
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14765/96441

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From [Department of Health](#)

Published on 21 May 2021

Last updated on 22 May 2021

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre has today been notified of 524* confirmed cases of COVID-19.

(*Daily case numbers may change due to future data validation.)

As of 8am today, 107 COVID-19 patients are hospitalised, of which 38 are in ICU. There have been 19 additional hospitalisations in the past 24 hours.

Dr. Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health, said:

"NPHET is closely monitoring variants of concern, and are concerned about possible higher transmissibility of the so called Indian variant and its spread in other countries as well as early reports of its impact on vaccine effectiveness.

"The public are keeping the disease under control and the HSE is increasing the number of people vaccinated every day. But the variant may nevertheless pose a risk to the progress we have made. NPHET will keep a close eye on this as we move towards the end of May and consider the advice we need to provide to Government on any further easing of restrictions."

Professor Philip Nolan, Chair of the NPHET Irish Epidemiological Modelling Advisory Group said:

"Despite recent challenges to the Health Service's IT systems, we continue to monitor key indicators of the disease in Ireland. The number of people hospitalised and in ICU are stable, the daily incidence is stable and the amount of people protected through vaccination continues to grow.

"We have confidence that if we can continue to limit transmission of COVID-19 through our individual behaviour and compliance to public health advice, the vaccination effect will lead us to further easing of measures in the near future."

Dr. Cillian de Gascun, Medical Virologist and Director of the National Virus Reference Laboratory, said:

"The B.1.617.2 variant continues to increase, with 72 cases currently identified in Ireland. Given the size of our unvaccinated population and the apparent transmissibility of this

variant, we would encourage people to remain vigilant and to continue to adhere to the public health guidance as the vaccine programme rolls out."

Dr Siobhán Ni Bhriain, Consultant Psychiatrist and Integrated Care Lead, HSE, said:

"While evidence around Long Covid continues to emerge, we do know that a cohort of the population exposed to COVID-19 are experiencing symptoms of fatigue, shortness of breath and other side effects months after their initial diagnosis. COVID-19 is a novel virus, it is unpredictable and so I would encourage our younger population awaiting vaccination to keep following the public health advice and avoid any risk of Long Covid related illness."

Professor Pete Lunn, Behavioural Research Unit, ESRI, said:

"Our Social Activity Measure has recorded increases in multiple forms of social activity: there are more people going to work, more visits to homes, individuals meeting with more people from outside their household, and higher numbers of close contacts. This is to be expected as restrictions lift. However, the data also reveal that these increases are much stronger among people who have been vaccinated. Most people who are not yet vaccinated are continuing to be cautious. Our data are consistent with the majority of people waiting until they are vaccinated before increasing their activity again."

The [COVID-19 data hub](#) provides up-to-date information on the key indicators of COVID-19 in the community, including daily data on Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

[See the slides presented by Professor Philip Nolan and Professor Pete Lunn.](#)