An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health
Office of the Chief Medical Officer

Epidemiological update
2nd September 2022

- A total of 1,652 confirmed PCR cases have been reported in the 7 days to 31st August 2022 (cases notified to midnight 30th August 2022), which is an 8.3% decrease from last week when 1,802 PCR positive cases were reported in the 7 days to 24th August.
- There were 2,786 positive antigen test results reported in the 7 days to 31st August 2022 (results uploaded to HSE portal up to 30th August 2022), which is a 4% decrease from last week when 2,898 positive antigen test results were reported in the 7 days to 24th August 2022.
- As of 31st August 2022, the 14-day incidence rate (PCR) per 100,000 population is 73: a decrease of 24.8% from a week previously (96). Incidence rates are likely to be underestimates.
- Nationally, the 7-day incidence (PCR) per 100,000 population as a proportion of 14-day incidence (PCR) per 100,000 population is 48%, demonstrating that there were fewer confirmed cases identified through PCR testing in laboratories in the 7 days to 31st August, compared with the preceding 7 days.
- The 5-day rolling average of daily reported cases (PCR) is 219 as of 31st August, which is 2.1% lower than that reported on 24th August (224).
- For national SARS-CoV-2 wastewater surveillance, in week 34 (to 27th August), of the 61 catchment areas for which a change from the previous week could be calculated, the viral load remained stable (within +/- 10%) in 42 of them, while 19 experienced decreases of 10% or more, and 0 saw increases of at least 10%. When data across catchments areas was pooled and normalised for the population, the weekly distribution of SARS-CoV-2 viral load showed a stable trend.
- There were 243 confirmed COVID-19 cases in hospital this morning (2nd September), compared with 257 last week on 26th August. There have been 31 newly confirmed cases in hospital in the 24 hours preceding this morning. On average, there have been 38 new COVID-19 hospitalisations per day observed in the seven days to 2nd September.
- As of 30th August, 37% (N=173) of hospitalised cases were categorised as hospitalised for COVID-19, with the remaining 63% (N=295) categorised as asymptomatic COVID-19 cases and potentially infectious.
- The age breakdown of cases hospitalised for COVID-19 (N=173) on 30th August: 116 (67.1%) aged 65 years and older, 27 (15.6%) aged 50-64, 15 (8.7%) aged 15-49 and 15 (8.7%) aged 0-14 years old.
- The vaccination profile of cases aged 15 years and older hospitalised for COVID-19 (N=158) was:
    - Of those aged 65 years and older (N=116): 32% had received a second booster; 39% had received a first booster; 4% had completed primary vaccination; and 25% had not completed their primary vaccination course.
    - Of those aged 50-64 (N=27): 7% had received a second booster; 37% had received a first booster; 4% had completed primary vaccination; and 52% had not completed their primary vaccination course
    - Of those aged 15-49 (N=15): 47% had received a first booster; 7% had completed primary vaccination; and 47% had not completed their primary vaccination course

Bloc 1, Plaza Míseach, 50 - 58 Sráid Bhagóid Íochtarach, Baile Átha Cliath 2, D02 XW14
Block 1, Miesian Plaza, 50 - 58 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2, D02 XW14
T +353 1 635 4251 | info@health.gov.ie
www.health.gov.ie

- There were 8 confirmed cases in critical care as of this morning (2nd September 2022), compared with 15 a week ago (26th August). There was 1 new admissions to critical care in the 24 hours preceding this morning. On average, there has been 1.7 new COVID-19 admissions per day observed in the seven days to 2nd September. Of the 8 cases in critical care this morning, were invasively ventilated.
- The number of COVID-19 cases in ICU whose primary reason for admission to ICU was COVID-19 has decreased from 7 on 23rd August to 5 on 30th August. The proportion of COVID-19 cases in ICU for whom the primary reason for admission to ICU was COVID-19 decreased from 41% on 23rd August to 36% on 30th August.
- According to National Office of Clinical Audit (NOCA) data, as of 30th August 2022, where vaccination status was known (N=12), 8% of COVID-19 cases in ICU were unvaccinated. Of those COVID-19 cases in ICU who had completed their primary course of vaccination (N=11), 82% were recorded as having received a booster/additional dose.
- As of 29th August, 126 patients were in receipt of non-invasive ventilation/Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) or High-Flow Oxygen in non-critical care settings, of whom 13 patients were COVID-19 cases.
- There continues to be a significant but declining number of cases of hospital acquired infections (note this is based on data to the week ending 21st August 2022). There were 55 hospital acquired COVID-19 infections reported in the week ending 21st August, compared to 56 in the week ending 14th August, and 70 in the 7th August.
- As of 31st August 2022, there have been 7,839 COVID-19 related deaths reported in Ireland since the outset of the pandemic. As of midnight 31st August 2022, there have been 43 COVID-19 related deaths notified which occurred in August 2022, 163 occurred in July and 111 occurred in June.
- Recent whole genome sequencing results (to 24th August 2022) indicate BA.5 is the dominant Omicron sub-lineage in Ireland. Omicron sub-lineage BA.2.75 has recently been classified by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) as a Variant of Interest. Three cases of Omicron sub-lineage BA.2.75 have been identified in Ireland through whole genome sequencing (WGS) as of 24th August 2022.
- As of 30th August 2022, 71% of children aged 12-15 years have received their primary course of vaccination. Of those aged 5-11 years, 26% have received one dose of their primary course of vaccination.
- As of 30th August, approximately 65% of the population aged 35-44 years, 59% of those aged 25-34 years, and 52% of those aged 16-24 years have received a first booster vaccine dose.
- As of 30th August, approximately 66% of the population aged 65 years and older have received a second booster dose.

Outbreaks for week 34 (21st August to 27th August) are based on those reported up to midnight on 27th August 2022.

There was a total of 35 COVID-19 outbreaks notified in week 34. Regional departments of public health are currently prioritising the reporting of outbreak investigations in settings that would benefit most from public health and clinical intervention.

Healthcare setting outbreaks:

- There were 10 new nursing home and 1 new community hospital/long-stay unit outbreak reported in week 34. The case range of these outbreaks was 1-26 cases.
- There were 16 new acute hospital outbreaks reported in week 34, with a range of 2-13 cases.
- There were 6 new outbreaks reported in a residential institution setting (5 in centres for disabilities, 1 in Children's/TUSLA residential centre) in week 34, with 2-10 cases.

Noting that national SARS-CoV-2 testing guidance may influence trends, the number of infections detected and reported daily is stable. PCR testing volumes and test positivity (11%) have also remained stable. A significant proportion of detected infections continues to be identified in older age groups.

The COVID-19 burden on acute hospital care remains significant but has reduced from a recent peak of 1,055 on 11th July, to 257 a week ago (26th August), and remains stable at 243 as of this morning. The daily average number of newly confirmed cases in hospital is stable at 37 per day. Data for COVID-19 cases in hospital as of 30th August show that 37% were hospitalised for COVID-19 disease, with the remainder categorised as asymptomatic infectious cases.

The total number of confirmed cases in critical care (8 as of 2nd September) has declined (from 15 as of 26th August). The number of ICU COVID-19 cases requiring mechanical ventilation has also been stable. The proportion of cases whose primary reason for admission to ICU was COVID-19 was 36% as of 30th August. The number of COVID-19 patients in receipt of advanced respiratory support in hospital settings outside of ICU has been stable.

The number of notified outbreaks has been stable across key vulnerable settings from weeks 30 to 34. COVID-19 mortality has remained broadly stable, although it is noted that there can be a lag in reporting of deaths.

You will be aware from colleagues in the Department that the acute hospital system remains under considerable pressure, with COVID-19 continuing to impact on acute capacity (243 COVID-19 inpatients on 2nd September).

We continue to closely monitor emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants and assess any potential threat to population health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that, based on a comparison of sequences submitted to GISAID (genomic sequencing database) in epidemiological week 33 (14th August to 20th August 2022) and week 32 (7th August to 13th August 2022), BA.5 Omicron descendant lineages continue to be dominant globally, with an increase in weekly prevalence from 72% to 78%. WHO reports that the prevalence of BA.2 descendent lineages remained stable in week 33 compared to week 32 (2.7% in both weeks). BA.2.75, an Omicron descendent lineage under monitoring, continues to show a relatively low prevalence globally, but a number of countries have observed recent increasing trends. In Ireland, recent WGS results continue to indicate BA.5 is the dominant Omicron sub-lineage. Three cases of Omicron sub-lineage BA.2.75 have been identified in Ireland through whole genome sequencing (WGS) as of 24th August 2022

In summary, the overall epidemiological situation indicates declining levels of infection and number of cases receiving general hospital care, although this figure has been stable over recent days having reduced substantially in previous weeks. In addition, the total number of confirmed cases in critical

care has reduced in recent weeks and is currently stable. Recent WGS results continue to indicate BA.5 is the dominant sub-lineage.

It remains important to provide clear guidance and communication to the public on the evolving disease profile and a cultural shift towards embedding individual and collective personal behaviours to mitigate against COVID-19 and other respiratory infections. In consideration of any implications for personal protective measures arising from the current epidemiological situation including as relates to emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants, there is no indication for any change in the current public health advice. However, it is important that the existing key public health advice continues to be communicated to the general public so that individuals may optimally protect themselves from severe health outcomes associated with COVID-19. It is particularly important that eligible groups for primary and booster doses (both first and second) continue to be encouraged to avail of vaccination in order to confer optimal protection against the risk of severe disease as well as against other potential long-term consequences of infection.

Current hospitalisation data indicates that most cases hospitalised for COVID-19 who are aged 65 years and older have not received a second booster vaccine (68%). The uptake of second booster vaccine in this population is sub-optimal currently and it is strongly recommended that individuals in this age group avail of this dose if they have not yet done so.

The current key public health advice is as follows:

- Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 should self-isolate until 48 hours after symptoms have substantially or fully resolved – please do not attend any social events, work, school or college if you have symptoms.

- Anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 should self-isolate for 7 days from date of onset of symptoms, or if asymptomatic, date of first positive test. Anyone exiting self-isolation at day seven should continue to adhere to other public health protective measures.

- Mask wearing is advised on public transport and in healthcare settings. Mask wearing is also advised based on individual risk assessment. Anyone who wishes to wear a mask should not be discouraged from doing so. Individuals who are vulnerable to COVID-19 are further advised to be aware of the risk associated with activities they may choose to engage in and to take measures to optimally protect themselves. Vulnerable individuals are advised to consider wearing masks in crowded indoor settings, such as may relate, for example, to social gatherings or other activities and events.

- Continue to practice good hand and respiratory hygiene by washing and sanitising hands regularly and coughing/sneezing into your elbow. Maintain a physical distance where possible.

- Meet up outdoors if possible. When meeting indoors, avoid poorly ventilated spaces and keep windows open.

- Many people who were infected with COVID-19 in late 2021 and early 2022 will now be eligible for a first booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Book a first booster appointment on www.hse.ie if you are 12 years or older. People aged 50 years and over are now eligible to register for their second COVID-19 booster vaccine. Pregnant women (from 16 weeks) and people with a weak immune system aged 12 and over can also register for their second booster, when it is due. It is not too late to receive a primary dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccines remain the most effective way of protecting ourselves from the worst effects of COVID-19.

On September 1st, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) recommended authorising two adapted COVID-19 vaccines; Comirnaty Original/Omicron BA.1 and Spikevax Bivalent Original/Omicron BA., for use in people aged 12 years and above who have received at least primary vaccination against Covid-19. These are adapted versions of the original vaccines to target the Omicron BA.1 subvariant in addition to the original strain of SARS-CoV-2.