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

Epidemiological update
30th September 2022

- A total of 1,648 confirmed PCR cases have been reported in the 7 days to 27th September 2022 (cases notified to midnight 26th September 2022), which is a 1% increase from last week when 1,637 PCR positive cases were reported in the 7 days to 20th September.
- There were 3,494 positive antigen test results reported in the 7 days to 27th September 2022 (results uploaded to HSE portal in the week to 26th September), which is a 13% increase from last week when 3,094 positive antigen test results were reported in the 7 days to 20th September 2022.
- As of 27th September 2022, the 14-day incidence rate (PCR) per 100,000 population is 69 which is 2% higher than a week previously (68). 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 50%, demonstrating that there was approximately the same number of confirmed cases identified through PCR testing in laboratories in the 7 days to 27th September, compared with the preceding 7 days.
- The 5-day rolling average of daily reported cases (PCR) is 218 as of 27th September, which is 1% lower than that reported on 20th September (221).
- Regarding national SARS-CoV-2 wastewater surveillance, in week 38 (to 24th September), of the 64 catchment areas for which a change from the previous week could be calculated, the viral load remained stable (within +/- 10%) in 18 of them, while 46 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 decreasing trend.
- There were 335 confirmed COVID-19 cases in hospital this morning (30th September 2022), compared with 300 last week on 23rd September. There have been 56 newly confirmed cases in hospital in the 24 hours preceding this morning. On average, there have been 50 new COVID-19 hospitalisations per day observed in the seven days to 30th September.
- As of 27th September, 40% (N=174) of hospitalised cases were categorised as hospitalised for COVID-19, with the remaining 60% (N=266) categorised as asymptomatic COVID-19 cases and potentially infectious.
- The age breakdown of cases hospitalised for COVID-19 (N=174) on 27th September: 123 (71%) aged 65 years and older, 29 (17%) aged 50-64, 15 (9%) aged 15-49 and 7 (4%) aged 0-14 years old.
- The vaccination profile of cases aged 15 years and older hospitalised for COVID-19 (N=167) was:
    - Of those aged 65 years and older (N=123): 40% had received a second booster; 20% had received a first booster; 11% had completed primary vaccination; and 28% had not completed their primary vaccination course.
    - Of those aged 50-64 (N=29): 17% had received a second booster; 28% had received a first booster; 28% had completed primary vaccination; and 28% had not completed their primary vaccination course.
    - Of those aged 15-49 (N=15): 40% had received a first booster; 70% had completed primary vaccination; and 47% had not completed their primary vaccination course.

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- There were 14 confirmed cases in critical care as of this morning (30th September 2022), compared with 12 a week ago (23rd September). There was 1 new admission to critical care in the 24 hours preceding this morning. On average, there has been 2 new COVID-19 admissions per day observed in the seven days to 30th September. Of the 14 cases in critical care this morning, 6 were invasively ventilated.
- The number of COVID-19 cases in ICU whose primary reason for admission to ICU was COVID-19 was 6 on 27th September, the same as a week previously on 20th September. The proportion of COVID-19 cases in ICU for whom the primary reason for admission to ICU was COVID-19 decreased from 50% on 20th September to 40% on 27th September.
- According to National Office of Clinical Audit (NOCA) data, as of 27th September 2022, where vaccination status was known (N=10), no COVID-19 cases in ICU were unvaccinated. Of those COVID-19 cases in ICU who had completed their primary course of vaccination (N=10), 100% were recorded as having received a booster/additional dose.
- As of 27th September, 131 patients were in receipt of non-invasive ventilation/Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) or High-Flow Oxygen in non-critical care settings, of whom 17 patients were COVID-19 cases.
- There continues to be a significant number of reported cases of hospital acquired infections, which has increased over the last two weeks (note this is based on data to the week ending 18th September 2022). There were 89 hospital acquired COVID-19 infections reported in the week ending 18th September, compared to 72 in the week ending 11th September and 58 in the week ending 4th September.
- As of 27th September 2022, there have been 7,942 COVID-19 related deaths reported in Ireland since the outset of the pandemic. As of midnight 26th September 2022, there have been 21 COVID-19 related deaths notified which occurred in September 2022, 94 which occurred in August 2022, and 184 which occurred in July.
- Recent whole genome sequencing results (to 20th September 2022) indicate BA.5 (including descendant lineages) is the dominant Omicron sub-lineage in Ireland. As of 20th September, 27 cases of Omicron lineage BA.2.75 (or descendant lineages) and 133 cases of lineages BA.4 and BA.5 with the spike mutation R346X have been identified in Ireland through whole genome sequencing (WGS).
- As of 27th September 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 27th September, 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 27th September, approximately 17% of the population aged 50-64 years have received a second booster dose, while 69% of the population aged 65 years and older have received a second booster dose.

Outbreaks for week 38 (18th September to 24th September) are based on those reported up to midnight on 24th September 2022.

There was a total of 31 COVID-19 outbreaks notified in week 38. 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 12 new nursing home and 3 new community hospital/long-stay unit outbreaks reported in week 38. The case range of these outbreaks was 2-13 cases.
- There were 5 new acute hospital outbreaks reported in week 38, with a range of 0-5 cases.
- There were 9 new outbreaks reported in a residential institution setting (3 in mental health facilities, 2 in centres for disabilities, 2 in 'not specified' facilities, 1 in facilities for asylum seekers/refugees and 1 in a centre for older people) in week 38, with 0-7 cases.

Noting that national SARS-CoV-2 testing guidance may influence trends, the number of reported PCR confirmed cases has been stable while the number of reported positive antigen test results has increased. PCR testing volumes have remained stable while test positivity has increased. A significant proportion of detected infections continues to be identified in older age groups.

The COVID-19 burden on acute hospital care remains significant. The total number of hospitalised COVID-19 cases has increased by 12% compared to a week ago (from 300 on 23rd September to 335 as of this morning). The daily average number of newly confirmed cases in hospital has also increased (50 per day observed in the seven days to 30th September). Data for COVID-19 cases in hospital as of 27th September show that 40% were hospitalised for COVID-19 disease, with the remainder categorised as asymptomatic infectious cases.

The total number of confirmed cases in critical care (14 as of 30th September) has been stable. 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 40% as of 27th September. The number of COVID-19 patients in receipt of advanced respiratory support in hospital settings outside of ICU has been broadly stable.

The number of notified outbreaks has been broadly stable across key vulnerable settings. 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 (335 COVID-19 inpatients on 30th 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 there continues to be increased diversity within Omicron and within its descendant lineages, of which a number are under monitoring. As of epidemiological week 36 (5th-11th September 2022), based on sequences submitted to GISAID (genomic sequencing database), BA.5 descendant lineages continue to be dominant globally representing approximately 81% of sequences, with BA.4 lineages (including BA.4.6) at approximately 8% and BA.2 lineages (including BA.2.75) at approximately 3% of sequences.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has reported that, as of the end of week 38 2022 (week ending 25th September), the pooled European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) notification rate of COVID-19 cases among people aged 65 years and older increased by 9% compared with the previous week, driven by recent increases in 14 of the 26 countries reporting

data on this indicator. Increases in overall (all-age) pooled EU/EEA notification rates has been reported for two consecutive weeks, with 15 countries reporting an increasing trend. This is the first increase observed across the EU/EEA in these indicators since the most recent BA.5 wave. Pooled EU/EEA rates of hospital or ICU indicators decreased or remained stable for the relevant reporting period. However, of the 27 countries reporting data on these indicators, 14 observed an increasing trend in at least one indicator compared with the previous week.

In summary, the overall epidemiological situation in Ireland indicates high levels of infection in the community and a recent increase in cases receiving general hospital care. In addition, the total number of confirmed cases in critical care is currently stable. Recent WGS results continue to indicate BA.5 (including sub-lineages) is the dominant variant.

It remains important to provide clear guidance and communication with 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. 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. 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 practise 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 earlier in 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, pregnant women (from 16 weeks), healthcare workers, people aged 12 or older with a condition that puts them at high risk of serious illness from COVID-19 or who have a weak immune system are now eligible to register for their second COVID-19 booster vaccine. It is not too late to receive a primary course of COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccines remain the most effective way of protecting ourselves from the worst effects of COVID-19.