

URGENT WRITTEN STATEMENT TO THE ASSEMBLY BY HEALTH MINISTER ROBIN SWANN – FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 3.30PM – RESPONSE TO THE EMERGENCE OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) - UPDATE

Further to my statement on the 26 February on COVID-19, I wish to give Members a further update on recent local developments.

An individual who recently travelled to an affected area has had a presumptive positive result for COVID-19 on the 27th February. In line with established protocols, this test has been sent to Public Health England laboratories for verification. This is expected to take approximately 24 hours. The patient is receiving appropriate specialist health care in keeping with expert advice and agreed procedures. Public Health Agency personnel are working rapidly to identify any contacts the individual has had and that process is at an advanced stage of completion. Robust infection control measures are in place to prevent possible further spread of the virus.

As I have previously stated it was not unexpected that at some point we would have a positive case in Northern Ireland. We have been preparing for cases of COVID-19 and the Health Service is well used to managing infections and have robust infection control measures in place to respond immediately.

The advice to the public remains the same, members of the public who have symptoms and are concerned they may have COVID-19 are urged not to turn up at GP clinics or hospital Emergency Departments. They should instead contact their GP or GP out of hours. Advice will then be given on next steps, including testing if required. A helpline has also been established on 0300 200 7885 and is available 24/7 to provide advice. More general advice about coronavirus is available at the Public Health Agency website and NI Direct.

My Department and the Public Health Agency will continue to provide updated guidance to health care professionals and other Departments and their authorities, including schools, as and when necessary. The Chief Medical Officer is today briefing a number of school principals to underline the advice to schools.

It is important that we continue to remain calm and focused on containment at this point. The risk to individuals in Northern Ireland has not changed at this stage. We will however continue to plan and be ready for all eventualities.

My priority as Minister is to ensure that all effective measures continue to be put in place in Northern Ireland.

I will make an oral statement to the Assembly on Monday 2nd March to update Members on developments.