

PNS/CC

24th March 2022

Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer
Department of Health
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50 – 58 Lower Baggot Street
D02 XW14

By email to: tony_holohan@health.gov.ie

Re: Advice re Mask Wearing

Dear Dr Holohan,

I am writing in regard to statements made by Government Ministers yesterday in relation to the absence of public health advice to the wearing of face masks in indoor and crowded settings.

On the 18th of February, the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation urged the Minister for Health to take serious caution when it came to the removal of the face-mask requirement and to take on board the current ability of the public health system to cope with additional pressure that the removal of the mask requirement may have on the health system.

Since the removal of the requirement to wear masks, we have seen over 8,407 patients on trolleys in our acute hospitals while COVID cases in our hospitals have been rising.

In your letter to the Minister for Health on January 20th you stated:

“The impact of the pandemic on the health system has been significant. It is important that a continued focus on health service resilience is maintained, including in particular:

ongoing strengthening of health system capacity across the spectrum of public health and community and hospital services, to ensure the system is adequately prepared for future surges in activity. This includes critical care and

isolation capacities, and the continuation of appropriate support for non-COVID care in a COVID environment.

a continued focus on infection prevention and control measures in healthcare settings, including appropriate mask-wearing and physical distancing requirements based on local risk assessment and advice from IPC teams, given the ongoing requirement to provide care for both COVID and non-COVID patients and the need to protect both patients and staff.”

You are all too aware of the link between mask-wearing and reduced transmission. I am urging you to make recommendations to Government in respect of the return of mask-wearing.

The pandemic is far from over for nurses and midwives. The increase in COVID outbreaks in our hospitals is not a surprise given the chronically overcrowded environments and the poorly ventilated spaces being used for clinical activity. While mask-wearing alone will not turn this tide it will contribute to containment, therefore, we must do everything we can to mitigate the situation getting worse in our hospitals.

The INMO is available to meet to discuss this issue further at your earliest convenience.

Thanking you for your attention to this letter.

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PHIL NÍ SHEAGHDHA
General Secretary
[Electronic Transmission – No Signature]

Cc: Rachel Kenna CNO