

**President of the Committee *for* Health & Social Care**

**Update to the States Assembly 2 March 2020 – Global Coronavirus Situation**

Sir

Firstly I would like to thank you for allowing me to give this update to the Assembly today regarding the Bailiwick's response to the global coronavirus situation.

The World Health Organisation declared a global health emergency on 31 January 2020 in view of the spread of coronavirus outside of Mainland China, especially in those countries with weaker health systems. On Friday 28 February, that is last Friday, the threat level was raised to 'very high'.

Sir, as members are aware, the situation regarding the virus which causes the disease COVID-19 is evolving rapidly. 10 days ago the situation was largely contained to Mainland China. The situation has now changed markedly and the recent increase of cases in Northern Italy creates increased risk and growing concern.

There have been over 89,000 confirmed cases worldwide – 9,000 of which have been outside of Mainland China. There had been over 3,000 deaths – 145 outside of China. 68 countries and territories globally have reported cases and three international hotspots of concern have been identified: South Korea, the Lombardy region of Italy and Iran.

In the UK over 10,000 tests have been carried out with 36 confirmed cases of the disease and there is evidence over the weekend that the number of suspected and actual cases is likely to accelerate.

Locally we have tested 63 Islanders with no positive cases to date – we are awaiting results on 4 cases and are working closely with the Public Health laboratory in the UK. This small number includes students and teachers who have been tested following a recent school trip near an affected area.

The Bailiwick's response to this evolving situation is being led by our very capable, Director of Public Health, Dr Nicola Brink, and her office and is being supported by a cross organisation team on non-clinical matters. The Committee for Health & Social Care has been monitoring the situation closely since early January this year. Managing such a dynamic situation is challenging but we are working with our partner agencies, including primary care, St Johns Ambulance and the Medical Specialist Group, together with the support of business representative bodies and the public to adopt a 'whole islands' approach.

An influenza pandemic has routinely been recognised as being one of the Bailiwick's highest risks from an emergency planning perspective and therefore considerable effort has been

invested over recent years to ensure that robust and co-ordinated plans are in place. Members will recall the pan-Island exercise held in November of last year to test our preparedness. Health experts, emergency planners and emergency services tested our general preparedness and to update the joint Channel Islands Pandemic Flu Strategic Plan. Such an exercise, as was agreed at the time, was also totally relevant to the management of an emerging and novel respiratory tract infection.

As a result of this exercise, we have extensive preparedness plans in place specifically for what we are seeing with coronavirus and COVID-19 disease. The focus of these plans is mitigation and reducing the risk for islanders, as well as communicating with the public to build awareness, managing anxiety within the community and providing reassurance that we are well equipped to respond to circumstances that are changing at pace.

Public Health Services have brought together the relevant specialists to provide practical advice and recommendations to ensure an informed and coordinated response to the Bailiwick's needs.

Sir, to provide a detailed summary of our preparedness for members in this speech would take a considerable amount of time. However, I will provide some key highlights to demonstrate the breadth and depth of planning that has taken place:

- Our Pre Event Assessment Team (PEAT) and the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) are meeting weekly, bringing together a cross section of specialists to provide practical advice and recommendations, ensuring an informed and coordinated response specific to the Bailiwick's needs.
- 24 hour access to Public Health advice has been made available to islanders.
- The use of JESCC technology to establish a dedicated 24/7 call handling facility if needed has been developed which will be utilised should a positive case be confirmed locally or should we start to experience high call volumes.
- A review of local policies and pathways for testing and treatment has been undertaken to ensure preparedness of the hospital, Primary Care, and the Ambulance Service.
- Pathways have been developed for transporting and testing of samples for the novel coronavirus in England.
- On behalf of the Committee for Health & Social Care I have signed an order making the disease and infection notifiable in the Bailiwick which establishes compulsory notification and quarantine.
- Procedures have been developed in the local context for contact tracing in the event of a confirmed case of novel coronavirus infection.
- A dedicated expert group has been established to consider the potential issues surrounding the cruise liner industry with further, evidence based, decisions due ahead of the forthcoming season.
- We have had discussions with the Community and Voluntary Sector on support for people in self-isolation if and where this may be needed.
- The Civil Contingency Authority has been informally briefed and arrangements have been put in place for necessary powers to be made by the CCA to help manage the

outbreak should it be determined that there was an emergency situation or were an emergency situation about to be declared.

Our communications have focussed on public awareness and information as well as providing specific guidance for health and care workers, schools and colleges, local businesses as well as islanders planning or participating in events. Advice is also available on how to follow good respiratory and personal hygiene which is a timely reminder over the traditional cold and flu season. A dedicated page has been set up at [www.gov.gg/coronavirus](http://www.gov.gg/coronavirus) detailing all of the updates and information we have in one place.

Sir, I would be grateful if members could familiarise themselves with this information and note that it is updated frequently. We all have a responsibility to reassure the community of the facts.

So what next? Well we continue to plan, prepare and respond where we can be proactive.

Within the last 7 days the situation has significantly changed and at an early stage, efforts have been expanded beyond Health & Social Care. Increased effort is now being dedicated to business continuity, supply chains, and the impact on the economy and businesses should the situation escalate. It is difficult to predict, but we need to prepare for every eventuality whilst ensuring a proportionate response. The experience gained from working across the organisation in preparing for the potential of a no deal Brexit has helped but we also require the collaboration, understanding and good will of businesses and the public to effectively and proactively manage this situation.

Sir, I would like to commend the work of the Director of Public Health and her office to date and the wider team who have been working on a multitude of workstreams behind the scenes. Both the Committee for Health & Social Care and members who would constitute the Civil Contingencies Authority if convened are assured by the work undertaken to date and the public should have confidence in the advice that it receives over the coming days and weeks.

Sir, our staff are trained to respond to emerging and unpredictable events and I am pleased to be able to update members on the calm and meticulous approach that has been taken to establish our preparedness in relation to coronavirus and to give reassurance that this will continue. Recognising the ever-evolving situation, a further, more detailed briefing for States' members is being planned for next week with invitations due to go out later today.

Deputy Heidi Soulsby, President of the Committee *for* Health & Social Care