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First case of coronavirus in Republic of Ireland

6-7 minutes

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The first case of the coronavirus has been confirmed in the Republic of Ireland.

The patient is a male in the eastern part of the country, according to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre.

It said he is currently receiving appropriate medical care.

The case is associated with travel from an affected area in northern Italy, rather than contact with another confirmed case.

The Irish Department of Health would not be drawn on whether the man had been on the same flight as [a woman who was diagnosed with Covid-19 in Northern Ireland earlier this week](#).

Dr Tony Holohan, the Republic's chief medical officer, said: "This is not unexpected. We have been preparing for this eventuality for many weeks now.

"Public health protocols have been in place since January and are operating effectively.

"The health service is well used to managing infectious diseases and has robust response measures in place."
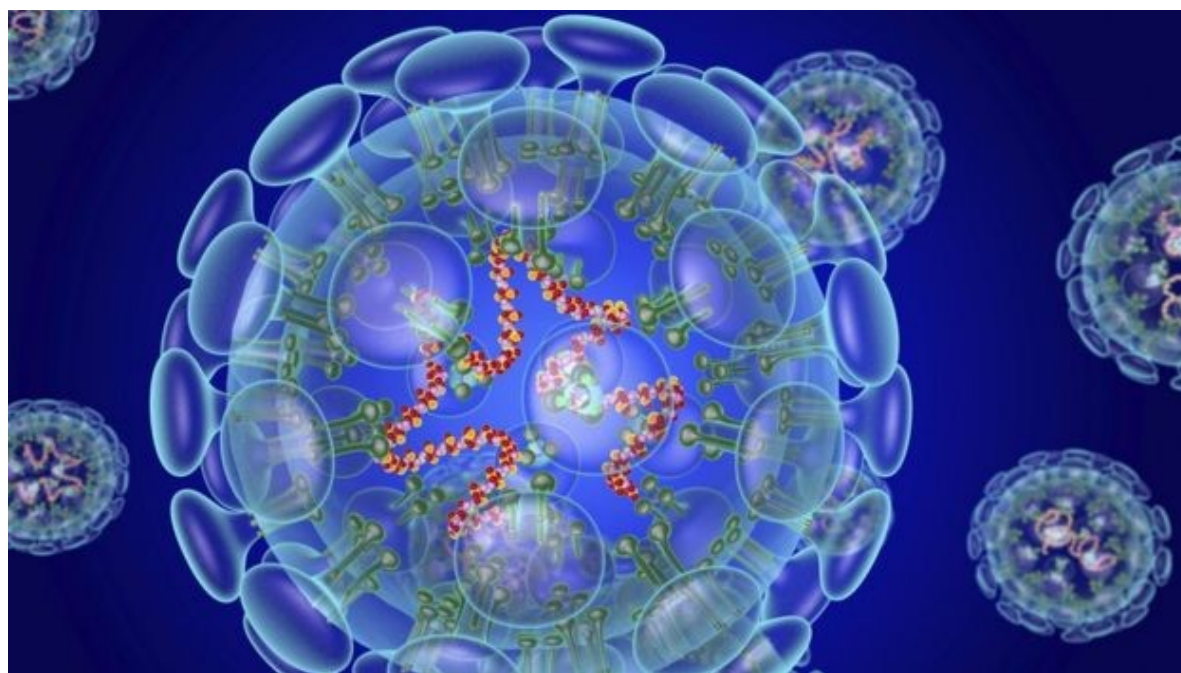

Image copyright SPL
Image caption The first case of coronavirus in Northern Ireland was confirmed on Thursday

The Director of the Republic's Health Protection Surveillance Centre said efforts are under way to identify and locate people who came into contact with the latest victim.

On Saturday night, Dr John Cuddihy said the "contact tracing

process has commenced" and "people who need to be notified will be notified".

He added this work will involve tracing "all stages of the journey" made by the man.

It comes two days after the first case of the virus was diagnosed in Northern Ireland.

The woman was in Italy last week and flew to Dublin Airport before travelling to Northern Ireland.

It was confirmed by laboratory tests on Saturday.

Officials have said everyone in close contact with the woman has been notified.

All-island strategy

Earlier on Saturday, Taoiseach (Irish PM) Leo Varadkar and the Republic's health minister Simon Harris held a conference call with political leaders in Northern to discuss how best to contain the virus.

It came as the head of the Catholic Church in Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin, issued guidelines to parishes "due to the recent concerns surrounding the coronavirus".

A number of changes to Mass have been advised, including the sign of peace being suspended and holy water fonts not being used.

Image copyright Reuters

Image caption On Monday Irish citizens were advised not to travel to affected areas of northern Italy

The Church of Ireland has also issued advisory guidelines to parishes which includes the recommendation that "physical interaction during services" should be suspended.

Both churches have said anyone administering Holy Communion must wash their hands and sanitise them with alcohol-based gel and that Communion must be administered into parishioners' hands and not their mouths.

On Monday, Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs advised its citizens not to travel to areas of Italy affected by the coronavirus.

Two days later Ireland's men's and women's Six Nations games against Italy in Dublin on 7 and 8 March were postponed because of coronavirus.

On Saturday, it emerged that Ireland's Six Nations match against France in Paris is under growing threat following the French government's announcement that all "confined" gatherings of more than 5,000 people have been cancelled.

Drive-through testing

In Northern Ireland, a "drive-through" coronavirus testing centre is in operation at Antrim Area Hospital.

The facility allows patients referred by a GP to be tested in their vehicle.

Antrim Hospital is carrying out tests on patients who are referred by a GP, who must agree a test is required based on travel history and symptoms, as first reported in the Irish News.

Image copyright RTE
Image caption The Irish Department of Health held a press conference on Saturday night

On arrival at the hospital staff wearing protective equipment will approach their vehicle and collect necessary swabs through an open window.

The Public Health Agency has confirmed that 93 coronavirus tests have been carried out in Northern Ireland and 92 were negative.

Helpline extended

Northern Ireland's chief medical officer Dr Michael McBride has been briefed by the his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, Dr Holohan, on the confirmed case.

NI Health Minister Robin Swann said: "Positive test results had been anticipated on both sides of the border and we have repeatedly made clear it was a question of when not if.

"I have full confidence in the expertise and commitment of our public health professionals and pay tribute to everyone working hard to contain the spread of this virus and keep us well."

On Friday, Mr Swann said the NHS 111 advice helpline had replaced the PHA's coronavirus helpline in Northern Ireland.

That meant people in Northern Ireland had access to the "same level of advice as citizens in England", he added.