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**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation**

Richard Pengelly  
Permanent Secretary  
Department of Health, Northern Ireland  
(by email)

30 April 2020

Dear Mr Pengelly

I am writing to you following our useful conversation earlier today about the provision of trustworthy and complete statistical information relating to COVID-19 in Northern Ireland.

The background is that over the past two weeks there have been a number of changes to the reporting of these figures for Northern Ireland. Responsibility for the daily reporting of surveillance data moved from the Public Health Authority (PHA) to Department of Health (DoH) on Sunday 19th April (at 5pm) with the release of a COVID-19 Statistics dashboard. This dashboard was suspended two days later on the grounds that a figure in it was incorrect, with limited explanation of the nature of the error.

In place of the dashboard less complete daily statistics are now being released by the DoH through daily news releases on the departmental website and through Twitter announcements.

It is clear that the Department wants to address these issues and resume publication of a comprehensive set of data on COVID-19, once you are assured of the quality of the data. The figures for COVID-19 are of huge public interest. As you work with your statisticians to fulfil this ambition, in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics, you should be guided by the following general principles:

- Daily surveillance statistics should be released in a transparent, easily accessible and orderly way. A news release on the departmental website and Twitter are not sufficient.
- There are gaps in the data and daily time series have been lost since the statistics began to be issued through DoH news releases. These gaps and losses need to be addressed.
- Data and statistics should be accompanied with clear information on data sources, definitions and explanations. Users should be provided with appropriate context and explanation, particularly now, where different statistics from different data sources are being produced and used in relation to COVID-19.
- Communication to users of the statistics should be improved so they know in advance about any changes and where and when they can find the changed statistics.

The advice of the Senior Statistician within the Department should always be sought in matters relating to statistics and data, and they should have sole authority for deciding the methods, standards and procedures and the content and timing of the release of official statistics.

I know there is serious public concern about the changes that have been made to the COVID-19 statistics and I look forward to your reply. I would be happy to discuss.

I am copying this letter to Siobhan Carey, Chief Statistician for Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson  
Director General for Regulation