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# Sunday Independent



FAREWELL: Funeral director Robert Maguire at Mount Jerome, Dublin, where Covid-19 victim John Gallagher was laid to rest on Thursday. Photo: David Conachy SEE PAGE 10

## A nation changed utterly

■ New measures on way as Holohan urges public to flatten Covid-19 curve more

Maeve Sheehan, Philip Ryan and Wayne O'Connor

### CLUSTERS & CONTAGION

Maeve Sheehan — PAGES 4-5

THE health authorities are set to unveil a range of new measures to tackle the Covid-19 crisis as latest figures revealed another significant rise in the numbers who have contracted the coronavirus and lost their lives.

At the end of a tense week during which the death toll began to mount in double-digit numbers, a further 17 people died yesterday and there were 331 confirmed new cases, bringing the total to 137 deaths and 4,604 cases.

But with the authorities warning that the crisis has not peaked and may not do so for another two weeks, there is also a growing awareness this weekend that Ireland is undergoing a fundamental change, such has been the profound impact of the crisis.

Political leaders yesterday issued statements of encouragement to the public, from the Taoiseach to the Fianna Fail leader — and the new Labour

leader Alan Kelly, who will be asked to join government formation talks this week, also said: "Ireland has changed utterly in the last eight weeks with the spread of Covid-19."

While Mr Kelly indicated that Labour was open to talks and would play a constructive role, the country's chief medical officer, Dr Tony Holohan warned that people needed to redouble their efforts to beat the virus.

"It has been a truly nationwide effort to stop the spread of this virus and to protect the vulnerable. We need to keep it going. We need to flatten the curve even more than we have," he said.

The Government is deploying GPs to the frontline in the war on Covid-19 following a grim week in which the death toll from the pandemic doubled.

From this week, doctors

will be posted to the first of 40 community assessment centres which are scheduled to open across the country for patients who have or are assumed to have the virus.

They will refer sick patients to hospital, to self-isolate at home, or to one of the self-isolation accommodation centres provided by the Government, such as Citywest.

GPs will operate the community hubs on a voluntary basis, but it is understood that their practices will receive a support grant equivalent to €120 an hour.

The measures are being ramped up to coincide with expectations that the coronavirus will peak in mid-April, as announced by the Health Service Executive's chief operations officer, Anne O'Connor, last week.

As concern mounts over the growing clusters of coronavi-

rus infection in 40 facilities, Health Minister Simon Harris announced a €72m bailout for private nursing homes.

Private nursing home operators:

- Will be paid €800 extra per month for every resident they have on the Fair Deal scheme up to 40 residents, under the terms of the package;
- Will be paid €400 per month for the next 40 and €200 for any thereafter;
- Can claim up to €75,000 for extra expenses incurred from introducing new measures to protect residents from the coronavirus but they will have to present a business case to the Department of Health.

Mr Harris also announced a series of new public health measures aimed at limiting the spread of the virus between nursing home residents and staff.

Meanwhile, efforts to resolve the Covid-19 test backlog continue. A rapid test kit that tests for Covid-19 antibodies and provides results

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BRENDAN O'CONNOR

## So. Tony Holohan is unwell

AND we thought we had problems before. But then something comes along and puts it all in perspective.

Most of us did not witness live the moment when Tony Holohan "clutched his chest" at last Tuesday evening's coronavirus briefing. Indeed some would argue that he didn't exactly clutch his chest, more put his hand gently to it. The footage from the live-stream was subsequently shared more than a message on WhatsApp from a cousin of my brother's friend who is a doctor at Harvard who swears that drinking your own wee will save you from

the virus. We are still unsure exactly what Tony Holohan said, but it was something about feeling a bit funny.

Lip readers and historians will pore over this footage in times to come, when all this is over.

When they announced Tony had gone in for tests, a million pieces of varying qualities of homemade banana bread paused mid-air between plate and mouth. And that was only the people who are still bothering to use a plate. A chill went through the nation.

We know there are many other experts working with Tony Holohan. There's

Cillian de Gascun, a more sciency version of Tony. And the others. People who start every answer, no matter what the question, by saying the one-word sentence "So". The "So" they all use conveys so much. It conveys: "That's a stupid question but I will humour you by pretending to answer it, but by actually saying what I was going to say anyway. And I will finish up by telling you that everyone needs to keep washing their hands." It conveys also: "Why have you asked me again when this is going to be over? I'm not going to be able to give you an accurate answer and no matter how many times you ask, you are not going to get the answer you want to hear."

And we have come to accept all these "So" people as part of our lives now. But Tony is the face of the operation. George Lee, who reports only on major

issues like financial crashes, climate Armageddon and global pandemics, was put on the Tony story. And then, on Thursday morning, Elizabeth Canavan, the civil servant who apparently runs the country now with Tony, told us that the CMO was back at his desk. We were relieved, but this wasn't enough. Habeas corpus, we demanded. Produce the body. And sure enough, there was Tony at the briefing that evening. Balance was restored. And what's more, Tony didn't make it about him, he turned it into a learning experience, telling us how the hospital he went to had been empty, and encouraging us all to go to hospital if we didn't feel well. And then we wondered. Had Tony actually felt funny at all? Or was it just a piece of educational theatre to get people to get themselves checked out. That Tony! So.



Coronavirus  
**COVID-19**  
Public Health  
Advice

# Protect yourself. Protect each other. Stay at home.



**Protection from coronavirus.  
It's in our hands.**

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