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**22<sup>nd</sup> December 2020**

**RE: A Message from the Chief Medical Officer & Chief Nursing Officer of the Department of Health**

To our frontline healthcare workers,

We are writing to you to convey our sincere appreciation and gratitude to you for the work you have done, and continue to do, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A year ago, no one could have expected what has unfolded. COVID-19 has highlighted the dedication, compassion, and professionalism of frontline healthcare workers.

You have responded fully and professionally for the sake of your patients and their families. You have adapted to the challenges that COVID-19 has brought, and patients around Ireland have felt your expertise, skill, and empathy. Throughout the year, you have met the many challenges we have faced constructively and collaboratively.

It is good to see that COVID vaccination is soon to become a reality. In recognition of the instrumental role you will continue to play in protecting the health of your patients and the population at large, the Government's *National COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy* will prioritise frontline healthcare workers in close patient contact among the first groups for vaccination against infection with SARS-Cov-2 and COVID-19.

For now, and the foreseeable future, we must continue to lead the way in adhering to our public health measures and practical guidance, which have been proven to reduce COVID-19 transmission. We ask you to continue with your efforts in bringing home our key messages to the public in your daily work. These are:

- Knowing the symptoms of COVID-19, isolating at home and contacting your GP if you feel unwell;
- Minimising in person contacts, especially if planning on meeting older and vulnerable relatives during the holiday period;



- When spending time with friends and family this festive season, trying to do so outdoors where possible;
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub if your hands are not visibly dirty;
- Maintaining physical distancing, leaving at least 2 metres distance between yourself and other people;
- Wearing a face covering when in busy outdoor spaces, in shops and shopping centres, and on public transport.

We know that winter in the health service is always a time of significant challenge, and this winter will challenge us like no other. Whatever shape holiday celebrations take this year, we know that many families will see less of those loved ones who will be on the wards, in practices, and giving care on the frontlines to those who need it.

We are indebted to you for the resilience and dedication you continue to display in leading our response.

We look forward to continuing our work together in 2021.

Have a safe and peaceful Christmas and festive season, with every good wish for the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr Tony Holohan  
Chief Medical Officer  
Department of Health

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Ms Rachel Kenna  
Chief Nursing Officer  
Department of Health