EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

The Public Health (Notifiable Diseases - Hantavirus Diseases) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

S.R. 2026 No.121

1. Introduction

1.1. This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Department of Health to accompany the Statutory Rule (details above) which is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

1.2. The Statutory Rule is made under Section 1 (2) of the Public Health Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 and is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

2. Purpose

2.1. To make hantavirus diseases (including hantavirus pulmonary or cardio-pulmonary syndrome (HCPS) and haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS)) notifiable diseases so that medical practitioners will be required to share patient information with the Public Health Agency if they become aware, or have reasonable grounds, for suspecting that a person they are attending has a hantavirus disease.

3. Background

3.1. On 3rd May 2026 the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) declared an Enhanced Level response for a Hantavirus incident following an outbreak of a hantavirus disesase on board a cruise ship in the Atlantic which was carrying passengers and crew representing 23 nationalities, including passengers and crew from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Passengers and crew who tested negative for a hantavirus disease were repatriated to their home countries to self-isolate. Given the incubation period (up to 8 weeks) further outbreaks are expected. In order to make hantavirus diseases notifiable diseases, it is necessary to make a Statutory Rule.

3.2. The addition of hantavirus diseases as notifiable diseases would place a statutory duty on registered medical practitioners to notify the Public Health Agency (PHA) where they become aware of, or have reasonable grounds for suspecting, that a person has a hantavirus disease. The provision of this information will be essential in enabling the PHA to identify confirmed or supected cases of a hantarvirus disease, ensure the Health and Social Care system can respond, and enable surveillance and tracking of the spread and epidemiology of the disease.

3.3. The inclusion of hantavirus diseases on the list of notifable diseases reflects the seriousiness of the current outbreak and provides the necessary legislative framework to protect public health.

4. Consultation

4.1. Not applicable

5. Equality Impact

5.1. Equality screening in compliance with the statutory duty imposed by section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was carried out and no adverse equality impacts were identified.

6. Regulatory Impact

6.1. A Regulatory Impact Assessment is not necessary as the proposal does not result in additional cost or savings.

7. Financial Implications

7.1. Not applicable

8. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

8.1. Consideration has been given to the human rights implications of this Order. It is considered compatible with section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

9. EU Implications

9.1. Not applicable.

10. Parity or Replicatory Measure

10.1. The Health Protection (Notification) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 were laid on 18 May 2026 to include hantavirus disease (including hantavirus pulomonary or cardiopulmonary syndrome (HCPS) and haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome(HFRS)) as a notifiable disease in England. Wales and Scotland do not intend to make similar amendments. The Republic of Ireland has indicated that it intends to make hantavirus disease notifiable.

11. Additional Information

11.1. Not applicable.