The below FAQs are based on prevailing circumstances in Ireland at the time of their preparation, with a small number of confirmed cases of COVID-19. They should be considered together with other public health guidance on minimising the spread of COVID-19. These FAQs were compiled based on a stakeholder engagement process.

Latest information on COVID-19 can be found on www.hse.ie

Frequently Asked Questions

Virus Information

1. How infectious is COVID-19 (Coronavirus) in comparison to seasonal influenza?

It is still very early to draw conclusions on how COVID-19 spreads, but preliminary information indicates that COVID-19 is as transmissible as the flu virus that circulates every winter.

Both COVID-19 and influenza viruses are transmitted from person-to-person and may cause similar symptoms.

2. How concerned should we be?

According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the current risk level for widespread sustained transmission of COVID-19 across the EU/EEA and UK is considered moderate to high.

The evidence so far suggests that in 80% of cases, COVID-19 causes mild illness (non-pneumonia or mild pneumonia) and patients make a full recovery. 14% of patients experience more severe illness and 6% experience critical illness. (Source: ECDC)

We do not know for sure which groups are most at risk of complications if they catch coronavirus.

But it is likely you are more at risk if you catch coronavirus and:

- are 65 years of age and over

- have a long-term medical condition – for example, heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or liver disease

You should follow the advice on how to protect yourself from coronavirus and other infections like flu.

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3. These things tend to have a time lifecycle based on SARS and previous pandemics. On current estimates, when do we expect this to peak?

According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the current risk level for widespread and sustained transmission of COVID-19 in the EU/EEA and the UK in the coming weeks is moderate to high with an increase in cases being reported.

It is not possible to predict how long the COVID-19 outbreak will last or when it will peak.

4. What other "flus" are prevalent in the Irish population at the moment? People may have symptoms that they think are Covid-19 when they are not.

Ireland is currently in its normal flu season, which generally lasts from October to April. Both COVID-19 and influenza viruses are transmitted from person-to-person and may cause similar symptoms.

At present, the main risk factors for determining whether you might have COVID-19 rather than flu are:

- If you have been to an affected region in the last 14 days and have symptoms.
- If you've been in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days and have symptoms.

Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Breathing Difficulties

If you have any of the symptoms **and** you fall into one of the two the risk categories above, you should immediately take the following actions:

- Stay away from other people
- Phone your GP without delay
- If you do not have a GP, phone 112 or 999.

If you fall into one of the two risk categories and do not have symptoms you should visit www.hse.ie for advice and guidance.

The list of affected regions can be found on www.hse.ie

HSE
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

5. Is there a central location where advice and guidance can be accessed?

Guidance and information is constantly being updated across Government websites.

Members of the public should access information from the HSE website - www.hse.ie/coronavirus.

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) provides more technical information for employers and health professionals on its website.

Health Protocols

6. What is the procedure for confirmed cases of COVID-19? Will all cases require hospitalisation?

Ireland is currently in a containment phase for COVID-19. This means the priority for public health authorities is identifying cases and their contacts early, in order to prevent further transmission (secondary spread).

Following recommendations from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET), the HSE has now moved to a community testing model for assessment and investigation of suspect cases. Suspect cases will be assessed in their home by National Ambulance Service staff, ensuring hospital avoidance and infection spread is limited. At present all cases are hospitalised, this will be kept under review.

When a case is confirmed, public health doctors will work to identify people who were in close contact with the confirmed case and will provide advice and follow-up to these people.

Some people, who are contacts of confirmed cases, may be asked to restrict their movements.

Information and guidance for people who are asked to do this and for the people who live with them can be found at HSE.ie and on the Health Protection and Surveillance (HPSC) website.

7. Why specify the "sex" of infected persons?

The Department of Health will release limited details about a person who has been confirmed as having COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

This information will be restricted to the **sex** and **general location** of the patient along with **how they contracted the virus** (for example, whether it was associated with travel to an at-risk region).

The Health Services prioritise patient confidentiality in all cases. Our priority is to create an environment where people feel safe and protected when coming forward to seek medical help.

This approach is in line with WHO guidelines and is being taken to reassure members of the public who may be concerned that they have contracted the virus, that if they make themselves known to public health doctors, their confidentiality will be protected.

This will encourage people to present themselves willingly and freely to report suspected symptoms.

8. How many acute cases can our system handle?

Ireland is currently in a containment phase for COVID-19. This means the priority for public health authorities is identifying cases and their contacts early, in order to prevent further transmission (secondary spread).

Comprehensive Public Health and Emergency Plans are currently in place for responding to public health issues, including those related to new infectious agents such as COVID-19. The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) has been meeting since January to review the COVID-19 situation in Ireland and to update protocols if necessary.

The HSE has issued the following information about its preparations:

- All acute hospitals have identified isolation facilities specific to Covid-19

- Acute hospitals have established multi-disciplinary Covid-19 preparedness committees

- The critical care services have developed management guidance for the care of any patients with Covid-19 who should require their services

- The National Ambulance Service is actively engaged in risk assessment for all suspected Covid-19 cases and the appropriate response to case recognition and containment.

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) packs have been distributed to GP Out of Hours Services, Public Health Departments and GP Practices

Should it be required, the HSE will look at increasing the surge capacity in the health system to manage any escalation of COVID-19.

9. If there is no vaccine and no treatment, what medication, if any, does a diagnosed person receive either in hospital or at home?

There is no specific treatment for coronavirus. But many of the symptoms of the virus can be treated.

Supportive treatments, like oxygen therapy, can be given while your own body fights the virus. Life support can be used in extreme cases.

If you get the virus, your healthcare professional will advise treatment based on your symptoms.

10. Is the UK approach to COVID-19 a better one? Why is Ireland not taking the same approach?

Ireland's approach to managing and containing COVID-19 is inline with World Health Organisation (WHO) and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) guidelines. Health officials are constantly monitoring guidelines from these organisations and will update its protocols and guidelines as required.

In addition, the National Public Health and Emergency Team (NPHET) meets every Tuesday to review the COVID-19 situation in Ireland and to update protocols if necessary. The NPHET is guided in this work through input from a specially formed Expert Advisory Group of health professionals with specific expertise on disease prevention and control.

Close Contact Transmission

11. HSE advice to family members of the pupils currently under self-isolation is to continue with their normal activities - go to work etc. Correct? Is this prudent?

COVID-19 (coronavirus) is generally spread through close contact with a confirmed case.

Examples of close contact include spending more than 15 minutes within 2 metres of a confirmed case or living in the same house as a confirmed case.

Close contact does not involve being around someone who has been in close contact with a confirmed case.

Public Health Officials will engage in comprehensive contact tracing measures for any confirmed case of COVID-19. If you have not been contacted by Public Health Officials, you are not deemed to be at risk and should carry on with your day-to-day life as normal.

A video explaining "How COVID-19 (Coronavirus) spreads" can be viewed on the Department of Health website.

If you have been in close contact with a confirmed case visit www.hse.ie for information and advice.

Mass Gatherings

12. When will guidance in respect of mass gatherings be available?

On 3 March 2020, the National Public Health Team (NPHET) announced mass gatherings guidelines are to be produced in the coming days following cross-Government review.

A paper is due to be published on 6 March 2020.

Student Travel

13. What measures are being put in place to facilitate international student mobility?

There are currently no travel restrictions in place on people wanting to come to Ireland as Ireland remains in the Containment Phase for COVID-19.

Updated travel advice can be found on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website.

Advice for students and travellers arriving in Ireland on COVID-19 can be found on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website.

14. What advice is being given in relation to international students enrolling to study in Ireland for the 2020/21 academic year?

There are currently no travel restrictions in place on people wanting to come to Ireland as Ireland remains in the Containment Phase for COVID-19.

Updated travel advice can be found on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website.

Advice for students and travellers arriving in Ireland on COVID-19 can be found on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website.

International Travel

15. Has a protocol been considered for overseas visitors particularly groups in the event of an outbreak and requirement to quarantine them?

Updated advice for people arriving in Ireland from affected regions is maintained on the [Health Protection and Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website](#).

Visitors who, in the last 14 days before arriving in Ireland have:

- been in an affected area where COVID-19 is circulating **OR**
- been in contact with a person diagnosed with novel coronavirus **OR**
- attended a healthcare facility where patients with novel coronavirus are being treated **AND**
- are unwell with symptoms of fever, cough, shortness of breath

Are advised to:

- Stay at home/in their accommodation
- Not go out to public places
- Not go to college/university or work
- Phone their GP or student health service (for students) for medical advice, rather than turning up in person.
- If they do not have a GP phone the Emergency Services on 999 or 112 and ask for the National Ambulance Service.
- Make sure that, when they phone, they mention that they have recently travelled or had possible exposure to COVID-19.
- The health services will arrange for medical help to be provided.

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16. We have a number of staff going overseas on personal travel. What advice would you have to an employer on return to work guidance/ protocols?

If an employee has not been to an affected region or been in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19, they should return to work as normal.

If there is no evidence of symptoms they should continue to work as normal and visit www.hse.ie for advice and guidance.

If an employee has travelled to an affected region or has been in contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 **and** develops symptoms (including mild cough or low-grade fever), they should:

- Stay home from work
- Stay away from other people
- Phone their GP without delay
- If they do not have a GP, phone 112 or 999

Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Breathing Difficulties

Further guidance on getting your workplace ready for COVID-19 can be found on the World Health Organisation website.

17. If an overseas visitor feels symptoms, what action should they take?

Updated advice for people arriving in Ireland from affected regions is maintained on the [Health Protection and Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website](#)

Visitors who, in the last 14 days before arriving in Ireland have:

- been in an affected area where COVID-19 is circulating **OR**
- been in contact with a person diagnosed with novel coronavirus **OR**
- attended a healthcare facility where patients with novel coronavirus are being treated **AND**
- are unwell with symptoms of fever, cough, shortness of breath

Are advised to:

- Stay in their accommodation
- Not go out to public places
- Not go to college/university or work
- Phone their GP or student health service (for students) for medical advice, rather than turning up in person.
- If they do not have a GP phone the Emergency Services on 999 or 112 and ask for the National Ambulance Service.
- Make sure that, when they phone, they mention that they have recently travelled or had possible exposure to COVID-19.
- The health services will arrange for medical help to be provided.

18. If a visitor is advised is to self-isolate, where should they do this?

In such a situation, the visitor should self-isolate in the accommodation in which they are staying for their visit and follow public health advice.

Employer's Guidelines for Workers

19. Is it safe for employees to greet drivers of refrigerated trucks arriving from affected regions?

Yes, employees can greet healthy people arriving to Ireland from affected regions.

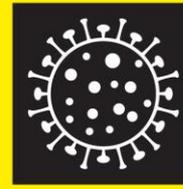COVID-19 (Coronavirus) can be spread:

- directly, through contact with an infected person's body fluids (for example, droplets from coughing or sneezing)

- indirectly, through contact with surfaces that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and which are, therefore, contaminated with the virus

The best thing people can do to protect against COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is:

- wash your hands properly and regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Further information for workers dealing with the public can be found on the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre website.

20. What advice is there for hotel and B&B staff on room waste removal, laundry services, dealing with overseas visitors from affected regions?

Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is only recommended for cleaning and entering rooms of confirmed cases of COVID-19 (source: WHO).

In all other scenarios, good respiratory and hand hygiene is the most effective way of protecting yourself from contracting COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

The best thing workers can do to protect themselves is:

- wash your hands properly and regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) can be spread:

- directly, through contact with an infected person's body fluids (for example, droplets from coughing or sneezing)

- indirectly, through contact with surfaces that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and which are, therefore, contaminated with the virus

For people working with the general public who are feeling well and do not have respiratory symptoms (for example, cough, fever, shortness of breath), facemasks and gloves are **not** recommended. There is no evidence that using masks or gloves in this setting is of any benefit to people who are not sick.

Further information for workers dealing with the public can be found on the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre website.

21. Frontline staff are asking about latex gloves as they handle a lot of cash. Could you clarify the position on this?

For people working with the general public who are feeling well and do not have respiratory symptoms (for example, cough, fever, shortness of breath), facemasks and gloves are **not** recommended. There is no evidence that using masks or gloves in this setting is of any benefit to people who are not sick.

Good respiratory and hand hygiene is the most effective way of protecting yourself from contracting COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

The best thing workers can do to protect themselves is:

- wash your hands properly and regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) can be spread:

- directly, through contact with an infected person's body fluids (for example, droplets from coughing or sneezing)

- indirectly, through contact with surfaces that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and which are, therefore, contaminated with the virus

Further information for workers dealing with the public can be found on the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre website.

22. Should frontline staff in airport security wear face masks?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that healthy people should only wear facemasks if caring for a person who is suspected as having COVID-19. (source: WHO)

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) advises that there is no evidence that using facemasks is of any benefit to people who are not sick (source: ECDC).

As a result, facemasks are **not** recommended for people working with the general public who are feeling well and do not have respiratory symptoms (for example, cough, fever, shortness of breath).

The most important action workers can take to protect themselves from COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is regular hand-washing and good respiratory hygiene.

The HSE provides a step-by-step guideline on how to properly wash your hands and avoid infection on its website.

23. Is there a plan to roll-out face masks to healthcare workers?

For those working in the healthcare system, active measures are being taken to ensure they are equipped to deal with potential COVID-19 cases if required. These measures include:

- All acute hospitals have identified isolation facilities specific to Covid-19

- Acute hospitals are establishing multi-disciplinary Covid-19 preparedness committees

- The critical care services have developed management guidance for the care of any patients with Covid-19 who should require their services

- The National Ambulance Service is actively engaged in risk assessment for all suspected Covid-19 cases and the appropriate response to case recognition and containment.

- More than 13,500 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) packs have been distributed to GP Out of Hours Services, Public Health Departments and GP Practices

- The most important action workers can take to protect themselves from COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is regular hand-washing and good respiratory hygiene.

Comprehensive advice and guidance for healthcare workers can be found on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre website.

24. Are there any source materials or advice for cleaning public transport during the containment phase - explicit guidance for staff requested?

Current information suggests the Covid-19 virus may survive a few hours on surfaces and can be killed with simple household disinfectants.

Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is only recommended for cleaning of areas of confirmed cases of COVID-19 (source: WHO).

25. Can the virus be spread through air conditioning units?

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) can be spread:

- directly, through contact with an infected person's body fluids (for example, droplets from coughing or sneezing)

- indirectly, through contact with surfaces that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and which are, therefore, contaminated with the virus.

There is currently no evidence of airborne transmission for COVID-19 and therefore the risk of transmission through air conditioning units is deemed to be very low.

Although there is no evidence of airborne transmission through ventilation or air-conditioning units, increasing the frequency of cleaning these units can be considered. Standard PPE can be worn for undertaking this task (Source: ECDC).

Business and Industry Advice

26. What is the timeframe for B2B advice? We have many queries in relation to events, engagement, staying at home etc.

The Department of Health is prioritising the sharing of timely and accurate information to the public as part of its COVID-19 response.

As part of this strategy, the Department continues to provide timely and accurate information to its stakeholders and the public to improve awareness and emphasise the vital role of stakeholders and citizens in reducing the risk and potential spread of this disease.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) is holding daily press briefings to update on protocols and guidelines on measures to be taken by businesses and members of the public in response to the public health threat caused by COVID-19.

In addition, the Department of Health is hosting a series of briefing sessions with stakeholders to keep them updated on the latest advice and protocols to be followed.

27. Would you promote remote working for colleagues in cities like Milan and Paris which have increased incidence in that region?

In such a situation, employers should follow local public health advice.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has provided guidelines of actions workplaces can take to prepare for a potential COVID-19 outbreak in the community where they operate.

In areas where there is community transmission of the disease, employees showing symptoms (including mild symptoms) should be advised to stay at home and work remotely if they are deemed well enough to do so.

Employers are also advised to devise a plan of what to do should if someone in their workplace is diagnosed with COVID-19.

Advice on planning for businesses can be found on the [WHO website](#).

28. Does the same principle of a 14-day shutdown apply to businesses as to schools in the event of a confirmed case?

Ireland is currently in the Containment Phase for COVID-19. This means the priority for public health authorities is identifying cases and their contacts early, in order to prevent further transmission (secondary spread).

As part of this strategy, Public Health Officials will engage in comprehensive contact tracing measures for any confirmed case of COVID-19. Depending on the level of risk identified during this process, additional precautionary measures may be advised by the HSE to limit further spread of the virus. This will be judged on a case by case basis.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has provided guidelines of actions workplaces can take to prepare for a potential COVID-19 outbreak in the community where they operate. Advice on planning for businesses can be found on the WHO website.

29. What action is to be taken by a company to protect other employees if an employee presents positive with the virus after testing?

Ireland is currently in the Containment Phase for COVID-19. This means the priority for public health authorities is identifying cases and their contacts early, in order to prevent further transmission (secondary spread).

As part of this strategy, Public Health Officials will engage in comprehensive contact tracing measures for any confirmed case of COVID-19. Depending on the level of risk identified during this process, additional precautionary measures may be advised by the HSE to limit further spread of the virus. This will be judged on a case by case basis.

There are a number of simple low-cost measures that can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. These include:

- Making sure workplaces are clean and hygienic. Clean surfaces and objects such as computers and phones regularly with disinfectant.
- Promote good respiratory and hand hygiene among employees. This can be done through the display of posters in shared spaces around the building. The HSE provides a step-by-step guideline on how to properly wash your hands and avoid infection on its website.
- Advise employees to consult the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website for latest travel advice information before undertaking business travel.
- Provide employees with information on what actions they should take if they think they may have contracted COVID-19. The Department of Health has made posters available for download with this information on its website.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has provided guidelines of actions workplaces can take to prepare for a potential COVID-19 outbreak in the community where they operate. Advice on planning for businesses can be found on the WHO website.

30. We operate in a five-storey building. If we have a case among a member of staff, should we close the entire building or just the relevant floor?

In cases where COVID-19 has been confirmed, Public Health Officials will engage in comprehensive contact tracing measures to identify people who may have had close contact with the person who has been diagnosed.

Depending on the level of risk identified during this process, additional precautionary measures may be advised by the HSE to limit further spread of the virus. This will be judged on a case by case basis.

Ireland is currently in the Containment Phase for COVID-19. This means the priority for public health authorities is identifying cases and their contacts early, in order to prevent further transmission (secondary spread).

To help limit the risk and spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, there are a number of simple low-cost measures that employers can take. These include:

- Making sure workplaces are clean and hygienic. Clean surfaces and objects such as computers and phones regularly with disinfectant.
- Promote good respiratory and hand hygiene among employees. This can be done through the display of posters in shared spaces around the building. The HSE provides a step-by-step guideline on how to properly wash your hands and avoid infection on its website.
- Advise employees to consult the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website for latest travel advice information before undertaking business travel.
- Provide employees with information on what actions they should take if they think they may have contracted COVID-19. The Department of Health has made posters available for download with this information on its website

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has provided guidelines of actions workplaces can take to prepare for a potential COVID-19 outbreak in the community where they operate. Advice on planning for businesses can be found on the WHO website.

Links for further information

Workplace Relations Commission

www.employeradvice.ie

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade travel advice

https://www.dfa.ie/travel/travel-advice/a-z-list-of-countries/

Travel Wise Twitter account at https://twitter.com/dfatravelwise?lang=en

Irish citizens who are abroad, or who intend to travel abroad in the near future, and have concerns about the coronavirus can contact the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the dedicated phone line at **01 613 1733**.

Education

https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/information-for-schools-preschools-and-third-level-institutions-on-the-coronavirus.html

Air Travel

The Commission for Aviation Regulation have an FAQ note on Covid-19 in relation to air travel, including advice on seeking refunds - https://www.aviationreg.ie/news/covid-19-related-advice.945.html

'**Business Continuity Planning – Checklist of preparatory actions in responding to COVID-19**'

The page also contains a link to the WRC COVID-19 Guidance Note for employers and employees and other useful information.

dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Business-Continuity-Planning-A-checklist-of-Preparatory-Actions-in-Responding-to-the-COVID-19-Outbreak.html

DCYA

Twitter: https://twitter.com/DCYAPress

Website: https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-children-and-youth-affairs/?referrer=/dcya/