

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for settings for vulnerable groups

V2

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**This guidance document gives general advice about preventing the spread of COVID-19 in settings for vulnerable groups, such as Homeless, Travellers, refugees/asylum seekers and others. The measures outlined are mainly focused on congregate settings or facilities managed by staff and can be applied in direct provision centres, hostels, hubs or residential settings including those without clinic or in-house nursing, medical or healthcare support.**

## Background

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, which is spread mainly through sneeze or cough droplets. You could get the virus if you:

- Come into close contact (<2metres) with someone who has the virus and is coughing or sneezing
- Touch - with your hands - surfaces or objects that someone who has the virus has coughed or sneezed on, and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes without having washed your hands thoroughly.

COVID-19 can be a mild or severe illness with symptoms that include:

- Fever (high temperature)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing

COVID-19 can also result in more severe illness including pneumonia, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome and kidney failure. It is likely you are more at risk if you catch COVID-19 and you are:

- 60 years of age and older
- have a long-term medical condition – for example, heart disease, lung disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes or liver disease

Further information on COVID-19 is available on the HSE website at:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html>

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## **General measures to reduce the spread of infection in settings for vulnerable groups**

Current information suggests that COVID-19 can spread easily between people and could be spread from an infected person even before they develop any symptoms. For these reasons we suggest greater attention to cleaning and general hygiene, social distancing measures such as visitor restrictions, limited social mixing generally and especially indoors in communal areas, (at least less than 50 persons) as well as greater support to those with chronic illness/ disability.

The following are some general recommendations to reduce the spread of infection in a facility:

- Advise staff who are ill not to attend work and to follow HSE guidance
- Advise residents to let staff know if they develop any of the symptoms described above and not to attend crowded areas if they are ill.
- Promote good hand and respiratory hygiene for staff and service users as described below and display posters throughout the facility especially toilets and washrooms, kitchens and communal areas.
- Supply tissues and hand sanitisers / hand gel outside dining rooms/ gatherings, toilets and kitchens.
- Ensure hand-washing facilities, including soap and disposable towels, are well maintained.
- Provide bins for disposal of tissues
- Increase your cleaning regime or ask your building manager / cleaning supervisor to do so.
- Ensure all hard surfaces that are frequently touched (high-contact areas), such as door handles, keyboards, telephones, hand rails/grab rails in corridors & stairwells, taps and toilets/sanitary fittings are cleaned regularly with a household detergent such as cream cleanser, washing up liquid or dilute bleach.
- For desks / reception desk: box of tissues are recommended for each row of desks in your office, detergent wipes, hand sanitizer on each row of desks, on your reception desk and small bottles for staff out and about in the community.
- Have a plan for dealing with persons who become ill with symptoms of COVID-19 including immediately isolating them from other people and seeking medical advice (e.g. phone a GP/ Emergency Department/ Public health)
- Have a plan for how the setting will manage core services (e.g. accommodation, food, meals, laundry, cleaning, showers, and toilets) in the event of someone becoming ill with COVID-19.

### **Hand hygiene:**

Wash your hands regularly. Wash your hands with soap and running water when hands are visibly dirty. If your hands are not visibly dirty, wash them with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer. Services to support these measures will be needed.

You should wash your hands:

- after coughing or sneezing
- before, during and after you prepare food
- before eating
- after using the toilet
- before and after caring for sick individuals
- when hands are dirty
- after handling animals or animal waste

See HSE hand hygiene guidance at <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

### **Respiratory hygiene:**

Cover your mouth and nose with a clean tissue when you cough and sneeze and then promptly dispose of the tissue in a bin and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the bend of your elbow instead, not into your hands.

[Posters](#) on preventing spread of infection are available on the HPSC website.

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### **How to manage a symptomatic resident/service user**

If they **feel unwell with symptoms of COVID-19** (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, high temperature) then they should:

- **Isolate themselves** (i.e. stay indoors and completely avoiding contact with other people or at least 1- **2 metres distance away from them**)
- **If they are at the facility they should contact the centre manager or nurse without delay** and tell them their symptoms. A translator should be arranged if required.

- Testing should be arranged for them by contacting their GP. If they do not have a GP the ambulance service should be contacted on 112 or 999 to arrange testing. *(The HSE is currently working on a streamlined care pathway to prioritise testing of patients in vulnerable groups)*
- They should remain in isolation until the test results are back.
- They should not be visited by outside persons while they are in self-isolation.

### **How to manage a resident/service user diagnosed COVID-19 who is well enough to be cared for outside of the hospital setting.**

When a resident/service user has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and their symptoms are mild, their doctor may agree to manage them in the community. There are a number of important instructions to follow in this case to limit the spread of infection to others:

- In general, if single occupancy rooms are available they should be used. If this is not feasible, multiple patients with confirmed COVID-19 can be cohorted into the same room or unit of accommodation. Contact your local Community Health Social Inclusion or Public Health Link for advice. Communication links to be given to services locally where possible.
- They should be advised to stay in their room as much as possible and avoid contact with others until they have had no temperature for five days and it's been 14 days since they first developed symptoms.
- Their symptoms should be checked regularly. If they become more unwell their GP should be contacted by phone. If it is an emergency, contact an ambulance and tell them there is a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- If they have to go into the same room as other people they should try to be in the space for as short a time as possible, and keep a distance of at least one metre (3 ft) away from others and be encouraged to clean their hands regularly.
- If they can, they should use a toilet and bathroom that no one else uses. If this is not possible, the toilet and bathroom should be kept clean.
- They should be advised to clean their hand regularly especially before eating and after using the toilet and to follow respiratory hygiene practices as outlined in the boxes above.
- They should be advised not to share food, dishes, drinking glasses, cups, knives, forks and spoons, towels, bedding or other items that they have used with other people in the facility.
- Ideally crockery and cutlery should be washed in a dishwasher (if one is available) or if a dishwasher is not available then wash with washing up liquid. Rubber gloves should be worn to wash the items.

### **Environmental cleaning/disinfection of self-isolation facilities whilst the resident is in their room**

All surfaces, such as counters, table-tops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets and toilet handles, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables, should be cleaned every day with your usual cleaning product.

Follow the instructions on the manufacturers label and check they can be used on the surface you are cleaning.

### **Environmental cleaning/disinfection of self-isolation facilities when person leaves facility**

Once a case of COVID-19 leaves the facility the room where they were isolated the room should not be cleaned or used for one hour and during this time the door to the room should remain closed.

- Ensure all surfaces that the service user came in contact with are cleaned.
- The person assigned to clean the room should wear gloves (if available), either disposable latex free gloves or household gloves, then physically clean the environment and furniture using a household detergent solution followed by a disinfectant or combined household detergent and disinfectant for example one that contains a hypochlorite (bleach solution).
- Products with these specifications are available in different formats including wipes.
- No special cleaning of walls or floors is required.
- Pay special attention to frequently touched flat surfaces, backs of chairs, couches, door handles, bed frames or any surfaces that the affected person has touched.
- Once this process has been completed and all surfaces are dry the room can be put back into use.

### **Cleaning of communal areas**

If a service user spent time in a communal such as dining room, reception area, play area, or used the toilet or bathroom facilities, then these areas should be cleaned with household detergent followed by a disinfectant (as outlined above) as soon as is practicably possible. Pay special attention to frequently touched sites including door handles, backs of chairs, taps of washbasins, toilet handles. Once cleaning and disinfection have been completed and all surfaces are completely dry, the area can be put back into use. No special cleaning of walls or floors is required.

## Laundry

- Laundry should be washed at the highest temperature that the material can stand.
- Items can be tumble dried and ironed using a hot setting/ steam iron if required.
- Household/rubber gloves can be worn when handling dirty laundry and items should be held away from your clothing. The gloves can be washed prior to removal and dried for reuse. Hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and water after removing the gloves
- If gloves are not available, hands should be washed thoroughly after handling laundry.
- If laundry facilities are not available, place the used laundry in a plastic bag for 72 hours after use prior to sending to laundrette for washing.

## Managing rubbish

- All personal waste including used tissues and all cleaning waste should be placed in a plastic rubbish bag.
- The bag should be tied when it is almost full and then place it into a second bin bag and tied.
- Once the bag has been tied securely it should be left somewhere safe. The bags should be left for three days before collection by the waste company.

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## **How to manage a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19**

If a service user/resident or staff member has been identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19, a Public Health doctor will advise them to **self-quarantine for 14 days** and will actively monitor them for symptoms.

This means:

- They should limit their social interactions in so far as possible. This means staying in the facility as much as possible.
- They should not have visitors.
- They should avoid social gatherings, group events and crowded settings.
- They can go outside on their own for walks, runs or cycles.
- They should not use public transport.
- They should avoid contact with the elderly, those with chronic health problems and pregnant women.

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## **How can staff protect themselves?**

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, respiratory viruses need access to these body sites in order to cause infection.
- Clean your hands regularly using an alcohol-based hand rub (if hands are not visibly soiled) or by washing with soap and water.
- Keep your distance when possible from those who are coughing, sneezing and/or have a fever by leaving a distance of at least 1 metre (3 feet) between yourself and others.
- Observe respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette for example when coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Discard the tissue immediately into a closed bin and clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- If you do not have a tissue cough into your upper arm or the crook of your elbow -do not cough into your hand.
- Masks should only be worn if you are likely to spend more than a few minutes within 1 meter distance from a confirmed case of COVID-19.

#### **Further sources of information**

[Guidance for mildly ill persons outside health settings](#)

[Guidance for infection prevention and control](#)

Further information on COVID-19 is available on the HSE website at:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html>

And the HPSC website at:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/>