



## Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for Homeless and Vulnerable groups

4<sup>th</sup> March/2020

v1.2

**This guidance document gives general advice about preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Homeless settings and for migrants/ refugees and vulnerable groups. These can be applied in hostels, hubs or residential settings including those without clinic or in- house nursing, medical or healthcare support.**

### Background

In late December 2019 Chinese authorities identified a cluster of novel coronavirus infections in Wuhan City, China. The name of the virus is SARS-CoV-2 and the name of the disease it causes is COVID-19.

The outbreak has evolved rapidly and further global spread is likely. We currently have two notified cases in Ireland. Because of the risk of the disease spreading to and within country, we must take all possible action to prevent the potential spread of the disease in the community.

COVID-19 can be a mild or severe illness.

The symptoms of COVID-19 include:

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

COVID-19 can also result in more severe illness including:

- Pneumonia
- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
- Kidney Failure

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

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

The SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 is spread mainly through droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. You could get the virus if you:

- come into contact with someone who has the virus and is coughing or sneezing
- touch surfaces or objects that someone who has the virus has coughed or sneezed on, and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes.



## General recommendations for all

### People who are ill with above symptoms should inform centre manager or nurse

If staff or residents feel ill and may have COVID-19 (see below), they should contact the centre manager or nurse without delay and stay in their room and follow the advice below:

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

#### **AND**

If in the 14 days before you became unwell, you have:

- travelled to Ireland from an [area with presumed ongoing community transmission of COVID-19](#), or
- been in contact with a person who has COVID-19, or
- attended/worked in a healthcare facility where patients with COVID-19 were being treated

#### **then you should:**

- **Isolate yourself** (i.e. stay separate from other people if possible 2 metres distance )
- **Contact centre manager or nurse or Phone your GP / or if no GP Ambulance 112** and tell your GP/Ambulance / ED about your travel history and symptoms.
- It is important that you **PHONE your GP/Emergency Department first and talk to them rather than arriving at the GP surgery/Emergency Department without contacting them** so that you don't put staff or other patients at risk of infection.
- Your GP/Ambulance /ED Doctor will advise you of the next steps over the phone.

If residents **feel well** and have no symptoms, but in the past 14 days they have:

- travelled to Ireland from an [area with presumed ongoing community transmission of COVID-19](#), or
- been in contact with a person who has COVID-19, or
- attended/worked in a healthcare facility where patients with COVID-19 are being treated

**they or manager** should phone the **HSELive helpline** on **1850 24 1850** for advice.

### **High risk groups**

Those considered to be at higher risk for COVID-19 include the following:

- People aged 65 years and older
- People with long-term medical conditions – for example, heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or liver disease



## **Reducing the spread of infection - Managers, Staff, Volunteers and Residents**

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

You should always practice good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene. Hand washing /hygiene and respiratory hygiene are a series of actions to take which are designed to reduce the spread of disease, including COVID-19, to yourself and others. These actions include regular handwashing and covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or the bend of your elbow when you cough or sneeze.

### **Hand hygiene:**

Wash your hands regularly. 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 waste

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

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.

## **Settings for homeless and vulnerable groups – Dinner halls, Cafes, night shelters, hostels with more than 2 to a room, addiction clinics, Direct provision /reception centres for persons seeking asylum, resettlement centres (IRPP) etc**

- Advise residents/ staff not to attend crowded areas if they are ill
- Have a plan for dealing 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)
- Supply tissues and hand sanitisers / hand gel at outside dining rooms/ gatherings.
- Provide bins for disposal of tissues
- Ensure hand-washing facilities, including soap and disposable towels, are well maintained
- Ensure all hard surfaces that are frequently touched, such as door handles, hand rails, taps and pews are cleaned regularly with a household detergent such as dilute bleach/ **Sodium Hypochlorite 0.1% dilution or other household cleaning products**
- Have a plan for how the setting will manage core services (e.g accommodation, food, meals,

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laundry, cleaning, showers, toilets) in the event of someone becoming ill with COVID-19)

### **Support for the sick should be carefully managed**

To date, there has been two cases of COVID-19 in Ireland and comprehensive contact tracing has been done by Public Health Medical Staff. People at increased risk of getting COVID-19, including people who have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19, may be asked to limit their social interactions for 14 days, including staying in the centre / home and not attending groups / clinics. In order to reduce the possible spread of infection, these people should not be visited by outside persons while they are in self isolation. Supportive care can be provided over the telephone and messages or on advice from Public Health. Additional accommodation arrangements may need to be agreed with service providers and HSE Links.

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 that greater attention to cleaning and general hygiene as well as greater support to those with chronic illness/ disability.

### **Advice for Managers, Staff, Volunteers Communal areas**

**Everyone eating or drinking should wash their hands or use hand sanitiser before and after meals.**

Activities/social gatherings **in** premises should follow sensible practices, including hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene as above. Posters/notices formally stating any guidance or changes in practice should be clearly displayed.

### **Standard Precautions**

**Standard precautions for infection prevention and control should be applied as per health and safety guidance for residential settings.** Personal protective equipment (PPE) is advised only for GPs undertaking direct close patient procedures or person who has symptoms of acute respiratory infection. Many cleaning/disinfectant products available in supermarkets work against coronaviruses.

Clean all surfaces, such as counters, table-tops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets and toilet handles, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables, every day with a household cleaner. Follow the instructions on the label and check they can be used on the surface being cleaned. Following cleaning, you can use a bleach solution to disinfect surfaces. To make a bleach solution at home, add one tablespoon of household bleach to one litre of water to be used for cleaning. If you have them, wear disposable gloves and ideally a plastic apron when cleaning surfaces, clothing or bedding. Wash your hands after removing gloves and aprons. Discard of gloves and cloths in the rubbish after using. Please see HPSC advice on managing rubbish. **Face masks are not advised in routine health care at this time. Additional precautions may apply in health care settings as advised by Public Health/ HPSC**



**Guidance for infection prevention and control**

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

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/guidance/guidancefornon-clinicalsettings/>