High Level Local Authority Transitional Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

2nd February 2022

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1 - Introduction

A. Context

The public health management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland continues to evolve in light of changing circumstances and risks. On 21st January 2022, the Government announced an easing of many of the public health restrictions. From 24th January, the requirement to work from home unless necessary to attend in person ended and a phased return to the physical workplace can commence.

On foot of the latest public health advice and to support the transition back to physical attendance in the workplace, and the continued safe operation of workplaces, a Transitional Protocol has been prepared which evolves from the Work Safely Protocol. The document outlines the current advice and best practice guidance for employers and employees to maintain infection prevention and control and other measures to support a safe return and ongoing safe operating of workplaces.

As part of the phased approach to the return to physical workplaces, employers and employees are encouraged to be supportive of continued good practices built up over the past two years, which support a safe working environment for all. Continued adoption of good infection prevention and control measures such as hand washing, respiratory hygiene, and ventilation in workplaces is advised.

Critical components of the collective response in relation to COVID-19 continue to apply including the self-isolation if symptomatic (even if fully vaccinated/boosted) or if having a positive COVID-19 test. It remains critically important that everyone continues to play their part in limiting transmission. COVID-19 continues to pose a risk to public health. The pandemic is not over and the emergence of new variants with increased levels of transmissibility, immune escape and/or virulence remains a risk both nationally and globally. In this context, business continuity of essential services should always be considered.

Engagement will continue to take place between Government, trade unions and employer representatives, under the auspices of the Labour Employer Economic Forum, in relation to guidance required for employers and workers for the transition period ahead, taking account of latest public health guidance and any further decisions of Government. The Transitional Protocol will be updated, and guidance reviewed as necessary in the period ahead.

The Transitional Protocol continues to be a collaborative effort by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the Health Services Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health. The update also follows discussion and agreement at the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), which is the forum for high level dialogue between Government, Trade Union and Employer representatives on matters related to the labour force. This work has also been overseen by the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The guidance is a general document applicable to all sectors.

- A copy of the revised protocol can be accessed here: gov.ie - Transitional Protocol: Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 (www.gov.ie)
- Information on the most recent government announcement can be found here: gov.ie - Government announces that most of the public health measures currently in place can be removed (www.gov.ie)

Local Authority Sector Specific Guidance
This High-Level Guidance has been amended in line with the recently published *Transitional Protocol – Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19.*

The purpose of this document is to consolidate national best practice, in line with Government and HSE recommendations in relation to the ongoing management of COVID-19. This high-level document sets out the general principles to be applied to protect employees and to identify and implement suitable control measures to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection in the workplace. This information can be used to inform the development, customisation or updating of local policy and procedure documentation.

This is a living document which means as Government restrictions and Public Health guidelines evolve, this document will be updated to reflect new advice. All sectoral guidelines have been developed in line with the Government's *Reframing the Challenge, Continuing Our Recovery and Reconnecting* and the Transitional Protocol and based on the latest public health guidance available from the Department of Health and the HSE. The links to latest guidelines have been included throughout the document.

This document, which is Version 7, has been approved by the Health & Safety Operational Committee.

Standard Operating Guidance (SOGs)
To support the implementation of this High-Level guidance, a suite of SOGs was developed, structured to reflect the operational activities of local authorities. These operational guidance documents are presented in a format which will allow individual local authorities to extract the key elements to enable them to be applied in accordance with individual operational activities. These documents are kept under review to ensure in line with current public health advice.

Please note: This document supersedes all Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs). The SOGs are subject to review and any necessary updates will be communicated to the sector.

Guidance and FAQs on Working Arrangements and Leave Associated with COVID-19 for Civil and Public Service
These FAQs have been prepared to assist employees and management in the Civil and Public Service to understand the process, rules and expectations associated with work arrangements during the COVID-19 recovery period across the public service.

The most up-to-date version of these FAQs is available at: [gov.ie - Update on working arrangements and leave associated with COVID-19 for Civil and Public Service (www.gov.ie)](www.gov.ie)

B. Working together to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace

The key to a safe workplace remains strong communication of key messages, consistency in the implementation of infection prevention and control measures such as self-isolation of those displaying symptoms, and a shared collaborative approach between employers and employees.

Lead Worker Representative
Continued engagement in relation to COVID-19 infection prevention and control (IPC) measures in workplaces is important. The appointment of the Lead Worker Representative during the pandemic has facilitated good communication and co-operation of employees and/or their Trade Union or other representatives in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. As some restrictions still remain, the role of LWR will continue to facilitate good communication and engagement.

Employers and employees are encouraged to maintain this role in each workplace for an appropriate transition period.

Lead worker representative(s) should:
• Work collaboratively with the employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19.
• Promote the continue adherence to good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette.
• Assist with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace.
• Monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
• Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.
• Make representations on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace

COVID-19 Communication
Local Authorities should continue to communicate to and inform employees about COVID-19 prevention measures, policies, and procedures to increase understanding of information and recommendations.

COVID 19 Signage
Continue to display applicable COVID-19 signage in buildings. The HSE has prepared a range of posters, booklets and videos to raise awareness about preventing the spread of the virus. These can be downloaded from the following link:https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/

Government has also updated the public health advice posters. Layer Up is a cross-Government campaign which encourages us to layer up on the behaviours to protect from COVID-19. A series of posters are available for downloading at gov.ie - Layer up: Posters and guidance for you to use to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our community (www.gov.ie)

Coronavirus (COVID-19)
The best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a workplace or any setting is through prevention measures such as wearing masks/coverings, proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and increasing ventilation and employees themselves deciding to be vaccinated.

How the virus is spread	
Know the symptoms. If you have them self isolate and contact your GP immediately	How the virus is spread: • Come into close contact with someone who has the virus and is coughing or sneezing • Touch surfaces that someone who has the virus has coughed and sneezed on and bring your unwashed hands to your face (eyes, nose or mouth) • Through airborne transmission – this is the spread of a virus in tiny water particles, known as aerosols. COVID-19 can spread in crowded or poorly ventilated areas. To protect against airborne spread, keep indoor spaces ventilated by opening windows and doors when possible.
Symptoms	
Know the symptoms. If you have them self isolate and contact your GP immediately	The most common symptoms are: • Fever (high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above) – including having chills • Dry cough • Fatigue(tiredness) Less common symptoms include: • loss or change to your sense of smell or taste– this could mean they're completely gone or just different to normal. • Nasal congestion (runny or blocked nose) • Conjunctivitis (also known as red eyes) • Sore throat • Headache • Muscle or joint pain (aches and pains) • Different types of skin rash • Nausea or vomiting • Diarrhoea • Chills or dizziness You may not have all of these symptoms, or your symptoms may be mild. Symptoms may vary for different age groups or variants of the virus. It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show. If you have any symptoms of COVID-19, you must not attend the workplace. Self-isolate and follow HSE advice, including in relation to testing and mask wearing. ➢ For further information on COVID-19 symptoms please follow this link: Symptoms of COVID-19 - HSE.ie ➢ For further information on COVID-19 testing please follow this link: Get tested for COVID-19 - HSE.ie ➢ Summary of guidance for those with symptoms, cases and close contacts: gov.ie - Guidance on the public health management of COVID-19 cases and close contacts (www.gov.ie)

	Close contacts
	For the latest up to date public health advice for close contacts including in relation to restriction of movements, testing, mask wearing and other protective measures see: If you are a close contact of COVID-19 - HSE.ie

Protection against getting COVID-19

	Wash hands regularly and avoid touching your face with hands. Hand gels can be used if soap and water is not available. See HSE for posters & videos on correct hand washing techniques: How to clean your hands - HSE.ie

Cough Etiquette / Respiratory Hygiene

	One of the best ways to prevent person to person spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19 is to use proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Follow this advice as strictly as possible and encourage others to follow too.
	Do
	✓ Wash your hands properly and often.
	✓ 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.
	✓ Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
	Don't
	X Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.
	X Do not share objects that touch your mouth – for example, bottles, cups.

Cleaning

	Enhanced cleaning regimes should be implemented ensuring that all frequently touched objects and surfaces are regularly cleaned and disinfected.

Ventilation

	Ventilation refers to the movement of outdoor air into a building, and the circulation of that air within the building or room. This can be achieved through natural means (e.g. opening a window) or mechanical means (e.g. central heating, ventilation and air conditioning). Adequate ventilation reduces how much virus is in the air.

2. Steps to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace

While public health and Government advice has changed, there remains a number of steps where continued implementation by employers and employees will contribute to preventing the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces. Maintaining these steps will also enable workplaces, employers and employees respond quickly should the public health advice change or should COVID-19 levels increase in the future.

A. Keep a COVID-19 Response Plan in place

- Employers should continue to maintain or take the following steps:
- Update their COVID-19 Response Plan to take account of the changed public health advice and advice as outlined in this guidance document.
- Facilitate the ongoing appointment and engagement of the Lead Worker Representative(s), as appropriate.
- Review and update Safety Statements and associated risk assessments and other relevant documents as required as employees return to the physical workplaces and as changes to the workplaces take place to take account of changed public health advice.
- Maintain measures to deal with a suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace. The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in protecting the person involved, their colleagues or others at the workplace. Refer to Appendix 1 for Sample Procedure on Dealing with COVID-19 Suspect Cases at Work.
- Maintain any specific measures or response for dealing with an outbreak of COVID19 (refer to HPSC general guide on management of COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace – Guidance of work place outbreaks.pdf (hpsc.ie))
- COVID-19 Induction training should be provided to employees prior to returning to work premises following a protracted period of remote working and to new entrants. This should emphasise that employees do not attend the work premises if they are displaying any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have had a positive COVID-19 test.

B. Maintain policies and procedures for prompt identification and isolation of employees who may have symptoms of COVID-19

The management and isolation of potentially infectious individuals remains a crucial step in protecting the employee involved, their colleagues or others at the workplace. It is also a crucial step in preventing an outbreak in a workplace from moving into the wider community and also to prevent cases in the community causing an outbreak in the workplace too. Employers and employees should still continue to keep themselves up to date on all public health information as the information can change on a regular basis.

Employers should continue to:
- Advise that employees do not attend the work premises if they are displaying any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have had a positive COVID-19 test.
- Provide instruction for employees to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during work.
- Display information on signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Cooperate with the local Public Health Offices if a case of COVID-19 and/or an outbreak is confirmed in their workplace and implement any follow up actions required.

Employees should also continue to:

- Follow the current public health advice and guidance, such as good hygiene practices, frequent hand washing and respiratory etiquette to protect themselves and their work colleagues against infection.
- Not to attend the work premises if they are displaying signs or symptoms of COVID-19 Symptoms of COVID-19 - HSE.ie
- Keep themselves up to-date on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their own well-being.
- Keep up to date with public health information.
- Follow the public health advice regarding self-isolation, restricting movement, testing and what to do if identified as a close contact COVID-19 (coronavirus) - HSE.ie
- Follow any specific measures in place to protect both yourself and to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Report to Line Manager immediately if any symptoms develop during work, and
- Cooperate with any Public Health personnel for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice given in the event of a case or outbreak in their workplace.

Contact Logs and Contact Tracing Requirements

There is no longer a requirement to maintain a contact log with details of employees and visitors to the workplace. However, it may be continued as good practice for employers to keep such logs, as they may still need to provide details on attendance in the event the Department of Public Health has to investigate an outbreak.

The Data Protection Commissioner has provided advice on processing data for contact tracing: Homepage | Data Protection Commission

Close Contacts in the Workplace

For contact tracing purposes, 'close contact' can mean:

- spending more than a total of 15 minutes of face-to-face contact within 2 metres of someone who has COVID-19, indoors or outdoors, over a 24 hour period.
- living in the same house or shared accommodation as someone who has COVID-19.
- spending more than 2 hours in an indoor space with someone who has COVID-19, for example, a workplace, classroom, social venue, household or transport.

Public health officials will, in the course of the contact tracing process, assess the physical shape of the room, presence of windows, surfaces, etc, to determine the extent to which everyone in the room are actual close contacts. Employers are encouraged to risk assess work practices in their organisations to minimise the potential of employees becoming close contacts of each other, also consider the implications of being designated as a close contacts and having to restrict their movements and to build in contingencies into their workforce planning accordingly.

- Information on Close contacts in the workplace: Introduction - Health and Safety Authority (hsa.ie)
- Updated HSE advice is available at If you are a close contact of COVID-19 - HSE.ie
- Guidance on the public health management of COVID-19 cases and close contacts is available at: gov.ie - Public health measures in place right now (www.gov.ie)

C. Maintaining COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Measures

While a number of measures have been removed, the public health advice remains that individuals self-isolate if they have any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have a positive COVID-19 test. Vaccination, including getting a booster, also remains a recommendation from public health as it will protect the individual from serious illness. Public health continues to advise that sector specific measures such as promotion of self-isolation when an employee is symptomatic, appropriate use of face masks (outside of specific regulated sectors where face masks are required), physical distancing, hand and respiratory hygiene, ventilation and signage be considered.

COVID-19 IPC measures should remain a focus for employers and continue to be part of workplace risk assessments.

C1. Hand Hygiene

Regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other viruses and bacteria. Alcohol or non-alcohol-based sanitisers can also be used where hand washing facilities cannot be accessed. Where an alcohol-based hand sanitiser is used, it must have an alcohol content of 60% or above.

Employers should continue to:
- Ensure that appropriate hygiene facilities and materials are in place to accommodate employees adhering to hand hygiene measures,
- Make available advice on how to perform hand hygiene effectively - How to clean your hands - HSE.ie
- Display posters on how to wash hands in appropriate locations throughout the workplace,
- Provide hand sanitisers (alcohol or non-alcohol based) where washing facilities cannot be accessed.
- Provide facilities for frequent hand hygiene for outdoor work, which should be located close to where workers are working. Outdoor toilet facilities, if reasonably practicable, should also be considered.

Employees should continue to:
- follow hand hygiene guidance and advice - How to clean your hands - HSE.ie
- wash their hands with soap and water or with hand sanitiser for at least 20 seconds.

Use of Hand Sanitisers

Alcohol-based hand sanitisers are highly flammable and must not be stored or used near heat or a naked flame. Instructions on safe use will be contained on the product label and further information will be available within the products safety data sheet. It is important that employers and employees follow the safe use information for the product. Further advice and supports are available at https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Chemicals/

Note: IPB has issued a Risk Management Circular Hand Sanitiser (Flammable Liquid) Safety.

C2. Respiratory Hygiene

In addition to hand hygiene, good respiratory hygiene and etiquette is also still necessary.
Employers should continue to:
- Provide tissues as well as bins/bags for their disposal,
- Empty bins at regular intervals, and

Provide advice on good respiratory practice including the safe use, storage and disposal of face masks/coverings and the safe cleaning of face coverings. Face masks: when and how to wear one - HSE.ie

Employees should continue to:
- Adopt good respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, and
- Follow good practice on the safe use, storage, disposal and cleaning of face masks/coverings.

C3. Physical Distancing
The requirements to maintain a 2-metre physical distance and to adopt pods of 6 for indoor events have been removed. However, public health advice for the individual and for sectors notes that adopting a physical distance continues to be good practice. Employers may choose to maintain some of the practices or arrangements that were in place based on the Work Safely Protocol for the period of transition back to office working. In meetings, events or training, the continued focus on hand and respiratory etiquette and adequate ventilation are all measures that may continue.

The legal requirement to wear a face mask/covering remains in place for specific regulated settings (e.g., healthcare, public transport, taxis, public offices, museums, libraries, retail premises etc.) until 28th February 2022.

Outside of the above regulated settings, it is still good practice to continue to use face masks/coverings particularly in crowded areas.

Employees who use or share work vehicles may also consider using a face mask/covering. Individuals at high or very high risk should also follow public health advice in relation to mask wearing, including wearing a surgical or FFP2 mask when in crowded indoor settings. If face masks/coverings are worn, they should be clean and they should not be shared or handled by other colleagues. Employers should continue to support and facilitate the use of face masks by workers who may wish to continue to use them.

Where temporary physical barriers (such as clear plastic guards) have been installed, they may be maintained, in so far is as reasonably practicable, for the foreseeable future.

C4. Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19 in the Workplace
The key message remains that an employee should not attend the workplace if they are displaying any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have a positive COVID-19 test.

However, while an employee should not attend the workplace if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19, the following outlines the steps employers should maintain to deal with a suspected case that may arise during the course of work.

Employers should continue to:
- include a defined response structure that identifies the team(s) responsible for responding to a suspected case in the COVID-19 response plan.
- appoint a case manager/designated contact person(s) for dealing with suspected cases.
- identify a designated isolation area in advance. The designated area and the route to the designated area should be easily accessible and as far as is reasonable and practicable should be accessible by people with disabilities.
- take into account the possibility of one or more persons displaying the signs of COVID-19 and have additional isolation areas available or another contingency plan for dealing with same.

- ensure the designated area has the ability to isolate the person behind a closed door. Where a closed-door area is not possible, the employer must provide for an area away from other workers, and
- provide as is reasonably practicable:
  - Ventilation, i.e. by opening a window,
  - Tissues, hand sanitiser, disinfectant and/or wipes,
  - PPE, gloves, medical grade or respirator mask, and
  - Waste bags/bins.

If an employee displays symptoms of COVID-19 during work, the designated contact person / the response team must:
- isolate the employee and have a procedure in place to accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keep their distance from the symptomatic person and also make sure that others maintain a distance too.
- provide a medical grade or respirator mask for the person presenting with symptoms. The worker should wear the medical grade or respirator mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises.
- assess whether the individual can immediately be directed to go home, get tested and follow the public health advice.
- facilitate the person presenting with symptoms remaining in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and arrange to get tested. Advice should be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and to put the tissue in the waste bag provided.
- arrange transport home or to hospital for medical assessment if required.
- carry out an assessment of the incident, which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery.
- arrange for appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and work areas involved (refer to section on Cleaning), and
- provide advice and assistance if contacted by the Department of Public Health / HSE in relation to contact tracing.

If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, they should telephone their employer to let them know they have tested positive for COVID-19 if they were in the workplace:
- 48 hours before their symptoms began
- 24 hours before their positive COVID-19 test result – if they did not have symptoms of COVID-19.

C5. At Risk / Vulnerable Employee
COVID-19 can make anyone seriously ill but for some people the risks are higher. There are two levels of higher risk – very high risk (extremely vulnerable) and high risk People at higher risk from COVID-19 - HSE.ie. There is different public health advice for each of these groups and employers should continue to follow and adopt this advice.

As employees return to the workplace, employers should take account of the particular needs of those in the high or very high risk (extremely vulnerable) category. Public health advice is that such individuals should get vaccinated and should follow public health advice in relation to mask wearing, including wearing a surgical or FFP2 mask when in crowded indoor settings.

At risk employees, may be particularly concerned about returning to the physical workplace and employers should engage and address concerns. The employee must follow up to date public health advice and the advice of medical advisors to plan a safe return to the workplace. A fitness for work

medical risk assessment may also need to be completed with the employee and the employer's Occupational Health practitioner (where available) and/or the employee's family doctor. Guidance on Fitness to Work is available from the HSA website Fitness for Work following COVID-19 Absence - Health and Safety Authority (hsa.ie).

The Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID-19 in relation to working arrangements and leave associated with COVID-19 and provides advice in relation to high risk and very high categories of employees - gov.ie - Update (26 November 2021) on working arrangements and leave associated with COVID-19 for Civil and Public Service (www.gov.ie)

Pregnancy and COVID-19
Employers and employees should continue to refer to the HSE website for the most up to date advice in relation to pregnancy and COVID-19 - Read advice on pregnancy and COVID-19

A risk assessment should be undertaken, which along with current public health advice, will form the basis for considering the level of risk of COVID-19 associated with the specific work environment and determining what measures need to be taken. Employees should engage with their Line Manager / HR to discuss any concerns they may have in relation to attendance at the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic.

C6. Cleaning & Waste Disposal
Cleaning of work areas should continue to be conducted at regular intervals. Employers should continue to:
- Implement thorough and regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces, rooms and work areas. If disinfection of an area is required, it must be performed in addition to cleaning, not as a substitute for cleaning.
- Provide employees with essential cleaning materials to keep their own workspace clean (for example wipes/disinfection products, paper towels and waste bins/bags).
- Provide employees with hand sanitisers and cleaning equipment for their work vehicle, for regular cleaning during the day.
- Provide sufficient waste collection points and ensure these are emptied regularly or as needed.
- Ensure hot desks have appropriate cleaning materials in place for employees to clear the area before and after use.
- In relation to routine disposal of waste in the workplace, waste such as used tissues, wipes and cleaning material should be disposed of in the regular domestic waste stream. Hands should be cleaned immediately after disposal of these items.
- In relation to disposal of waste from a person who becomes symptomatic while at work, this waste should be disposed of in a disposable refuse bag. When the waste bag is three quarters full, it should be tied securely, placed into a second refuse bag and tied again. The bag should then be left in a safe location for three days (72 hours) before putting out for collection.

Further details and advice on cleaning and waste disposal for different work sectors are available from hpsc.ie. Additional information is now also available in the HPSC Cleaning Guidance for Use in Non-Healthcare Settings which covers routine cleaning advice in the absence of a known symptomatic or confirmed case of COVID 19 and for situations where COVID-19 is suspected/confirmed.

C7. Wearing of Face Coverings / Masks

All types of masks, including cloth masks, can significantly reduce community transmission if properly made, well fitted, and appropriately worn.

There are different types of face coverings / masks:

Face Coverings

Face coverings are required by law in certain settings such as on public transport, in public offices and shops and in some other settings as outlined here: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/aac74c-guidance-on-safe-use-of-face-coverings/). The legal requirement to wear a face mask/covering remains in place for specific regulated settings until 28th February 2022.

Face coverings are also recommended when staying 2 metres apart from people is difficult. Government has recently updated advice on the wearing of face masks / coverings in the workplace, with an emphasis on the routine and correct wearing of masks in shared work areas and also during breaks, in locker and toilet areas and if travelling together to work.

Employees should be advised to wear appropriate face masks/coverings when in shared / communal areas as an extra preventative measure, e.g.
- Entering and leaving the workplace
- Not sitting at your desk/work area/base or moving between floors/areas/bases
- Public access areas of buildings, including receptions/foyers and public counters.
- In locker rooms, toilets and other welfare facilities
- Moving around work locations
- During breaks (prior to and after eating).

If any employee has a reasonable excuse not to wear a face covering they should inform their Line Manager. Refer to this link for further information - When to wear a face covering - HSE.ie

Wearing of cloth face coverings may help prevent people who do not know they have COVID-19 (Coronavirus) from spreading it to others. It is important that while wearing a face covering, individuals still follow public health advice in relation to hand and respiratory etiquette.

If a face covering is worn it should be clean and should not be shared or handled by other colleagues. HSE provides advice in relation to the correct wearing of face coverings and the exemptions that apply: https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html

Please continue to refer to Face masks: when and how to wear one - HSE.ie for the most up to date advice in relation to wearing of face coverings.

Face Masks

In the context of COVID-19, facemasks should be available for the following:
- As identified by Risk Assessment.
- Specific circumstances relating to COVID-19 e.g. close working activity.
- Suspect Case of COVID-19 - if an employee displays symptoms of COVID-19 during work, the employer must provide a well fitted medical grade or respirator mask for the person presenting with symptoms. The person should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises.

Medical Grade / Respirator Mask

All types of masks including cloth masks, can significantly reduce community transmission if well fitted and worn properly, while medical grade or respirators if worn and fitted properly offer greater protection. Anyone who wishes to wear a medical grade or respirator mask instead of a cloth mask should do so, so long as whichever mask they choose is well-fitting and worn properly noting however, their use should be prioritised, in the first instance, for healthcare workers and healthcare settings. Medically vulnerable cohorts and older age groups (those aged 60 years and over) are currently advised to wear a medical grade mask when in crowded outdoor spaces or confined indoor spaces. Some individuals in these groups may prefer to wear a respirator mask.

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) recommends the wearing of medical grade or FFP2 masks for:

- anyone over 13 years with a positive COVID-19 test result
- anyone over 13 years with symptoms of COVID-19
- all close contacts aged over 13 years old for 10 days
- vulnerable people in indoor or crowded outdoor places
- over-60s in indoor or crowded outdoor places

For further information on the types of face masks please see: Face masks: when and how to wear one - HSE.ie.

Face Visors

HSE advice is that visors are not the best option for protecting yourself and others from COVID-19 and should only be worn in certain circumstances see hse.ie for further information . See hpsc.ie for a summary document on the Efficacy of visors compared with masks in the prevention of transmission of COVID-19 in non-healthcare settings. Visors may stop some spread of droplets from your nose or mouth. This is better than not wearing any face covering. Visors should only be worn if you have an illness or impairment that makes wearing a face covering difficult or if you are dealing with people with particular needs (e.g., hard of hearing). Where visors are used, they should cover the entire face (above the eyes to below the chin and wrap around from ear to ear) and be correctly applied. Reusable visors should be cleaned after each use and then stored in a clean place until needed.

C8. Ventilation

Ventilation refers to the movement of outdoor air into a building, and the circulation of that air within the building or room while removing stale air to improve the air quality. This can be achieved through natural means (e.g., opening a window) or by mechanical means e.g. HVAC systems. While ventilation reduces the amount of virus in the air and the aerosol risk, it will have minimal impact on droplet transmission where people are within 2 metres of each other, or contact transmission (touching surfaces), which is why it is not a standalone measure and continued adherence to other public health advice is absolutely essential.

Determining ventilation of enclosed workplace settings should be considered as part of the workplace risk assessment. The priority for the risk assessment is to identify areas of the workplace that are usually occupied and are poorly ventilated. These are also the areas that should be prioritised for improvement to reduce the risk of aerosol transmission of the virus. A poorly ventilated area may include:

- Areas where people work and where there is no mechanical ventilation or natural ventilation such as open windows, doors or vents etc.

- Areas that use mechanical ventilation if the system recirculates air and has no outdoor air supply in place.
- Areas that are stuffy or smell bad.

There are various recommendations made for what the appropriate air changes per hour (ACH) could be for different indoor settings. However, the overall objective should be to increase the ventilation in the workspace wherever possible thereby improving the existing ventilation without impacting on the employee/occupants' comfort. Details on ventilation, including how to assess ventilation in the workplace, are available from the HSA https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid-19_coronavirus_information_and_resources/

Guidance on non-healthcare buildings is available from hpsc.ie Buildings and Facilities Guidance - Health Protection Surveillance Centre (hpsc.ie)

C9. Antigen Diagnostic Tests (ADTs) and Rapid Antigen Diagnostic Tests (RADTs)
Rapid Antigen Diagnostic tests (RADTs) are currently being used by public health to identify cases of COVID-19 in particular age groups. However, their more widespread use in the workplace remains a voluntary option which employers, in consultation with employees and their representatives, may wish to adopt. Even if RADTs are deployed in a workplace setting, general public health advice regarding hand washing, wearing masks/coverings, respiratory etiquette, and ventilation, all still need to be adhered to in full. In addition, the use of RADTs does not preclude the strict requirement that all those who are symptomatic should self-isolate and not attend the workplace. If a workplace adopts a RAD testing system, employers must maintain personal information collected in line with GDPR requirements.

For further details on RADTs, please visit the Health Products Regulatory Authority website.

C10. Vaccination
Public health advice still emphasises that vaccination against COVID-19 remains a key element to not only protect the individual from serious illness but also in protecting the wider community too. Employers and employees should keep up to date with information on the national strategy regarding vaccination against COVID-19 COVID-19 vaccines - HSE.ie

C.11 Well-Being in the Workplace
Infectious disease outbreaks like COVID-19 can be worrying and can affect your mental health. Employees should be reminded of the Employee Assistance Programmes or Occupational Health Service available.

There are also many online resources available which can be accessed at: Minding your mental health during the coronavirus pandemic - HSE.ie

The government has also launched the "*Keep Well"* campaign which aims to support people and communities to mind their physical and mental health over the coming months. The Government Plan COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 - The Path Ahead highlights the important role that individual and community resilience will play in contributing to our ongoing response to COVID-19.

The "Keep Well" campaign provides guidelines, information, and tips on keeping well and can be accessed here: gov.ie - Healthy Ireland (www.gov.ie)

The HSA has a range of supports, resources and advice such as:

- dealing with stress as a result of the changes in a worker's personal and/or working life during COVID-19 Resources for Managing Health and Wellbeing (Podcasts and Video) - Health and Safety Authority (hsa.ie)
- a free online risk assessment tool for addressing work related stress: Home | Work Positive

D – Key Control Measures – Indoor Settings

D1. Customer Facing Roles / Building Entrances / Public Counters
With the updated public health advice now in place and the removal of certain restriction measures, where direct customer or client contacts occur, it is recommended that employers review the measures in place.

Note: The legal requirement to wear a face mask/covering remains in place for specific regulated settings (e.g., healthcare, public transport, taxis, public offices, museums, libraries, retail premises etc.) until 28th February 2022. gov.ie - Government announces that most of the public health measures currently in place can be removed (www.gov.ie)

Measures that should also be continued include:
- Continued provision of hand sanitisers at main entry and exit points.
- Displaying advice on COVID-19 in prominent locations.
- Maintaining regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces and work areas.
- Where temporary physical barriers (such as clear plastic guards) have been installed, they may be maintained in so far is as reasonably practicable, for the foreseeable future.

D2. Office Arrangements
- Although the requirements around physical distancing measures have been removed, public health advice for the individual and for sectors notes that it is still good practice to adopt a physical distance. Employers are advised to take this into account when reviewing occupancy levels and risk assessments.
- Continue to promote a clean desk policy and provide essential cleaning materials for employees to keep their own workspace clean.
- Regularly clean common contact surfaces in offices (for example, photocopiers, laptops, telephone, handsets, desks). Ensure that cleaning materials and waste disposal options are provided.
- Offices should continue be well ventilated, and windows kept open whenever possible to increase air flow and ventilation without causing discomfort– see ventilation section for further information.

D.3 Meetings
- Although the requirements around physical distancing measures have been removed, public health advice for the individual and for sectors notes that it is still good practice to adopt a physical distance.
- Where appropriate, meetings should continue to be conducted using online remote means.
- Where face to face meetings are held:
  - Meeting room should be well ventilated during use ideally through open windows.
  - Adherence to general hygiene procedures and ensure attendees have sanitised hands before going into a meeting.
  - Welfare facilities/hand sanitiser / wipes to be made available at / adjacent to the meeting room.
  - Record of meeting attendees advised to be kept for contact tracing purposes.

- o   Ensure attendees are advised in advance that they must not attend the meeting if they have any COVID-19 symptoms or feel unwell (or suspect they have been exposed to COVID-19).
- o   Display COVID-19 posters prominently.
- o   Ensure appropriate cleaning regime in place.

D4. Canteen and Eating Arrangements

- A review should be carried out to determine the appropriate number of employees who can be facilitated in canteen, kitchen or break area at any one time.
- Employees should sanitise their hands before and after eating.
- Hand cleaning facilities or hand sanitiser should be available at the canteen/ kitchen entrance and exit.
- COVID-19 information posters should be prominently displayed.
- Payments should be taken by contactless card wherever possible.
- All rubbish should be disposed of appropriately.
- Ensure appropriate cleaning regime in place.

D5. Toilet Facilities

- Ensure adequate provision of soap and hand washing facilities.
- Provide clear pictorial guides for washing hands (See HSE Posters advice https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/)
- Review and enhance the cleaning regimes for toilet facilities, particularly frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, locks, taps and the toilet flushing mechanisms.
- Provide suitable and sufficient rubbish bins for hand towels with regular removal and disposal.

D6. Passenger Lift Usage

- Encourage employees not to use lifts in buildings if possible and to use the stairs instead.

D7. Travel to / from Work

- Where an employee exhibits any signs of COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19 they should not travel to work.
- Where possible, walk or cycle, to and from work.
- If availing of public transport, wear a face covering / mask and follow updated public transport information.
- Practice personal protective measures by avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth and sanitising your hands often.
- Sanitise hands on arrival at work location.

D8. Delivery of Training during COVID-19

- Delivery of in-person training should be based on risk assessment and ability to comply with relevant guidance.
- Although the requirements around physical distancing measures have been removed, public health advice for the individual and for sectors notes that it is still good practice to adopt a physical distance.
- Delivery of all SOLAS Training Courses must comply with current *"The SOLAS Standard Operational Pandemic Containment Guidelines"*.
- It is recommended that attendees wear a face covering for the duration of the training. This is not a replacement for essential personal behaviours like cough/sneeze etiquette or sanitising hands regularly, but an additional protective measure.

D9. Travelling for Essential Business or Work Purposes

For advice on travelling for work purposes see COVID-19 Travel advice on
gov.ie https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/75d92-covid-19-travel-advice/ and follow the Department
of Foreign Affairs advice at https://www.dfa.ie/travel/travel-advice/coronavirus/general-covid-19-travel-advisory/

It is important for employees to keep up to-date on travel restrictions and requirements in and out
of the country as these may be subject to change on a regular basis.

E - COVID-19 Key Control Measures - Outdoor Activities

E.1 Using Council Vehicles
- If more than one per person per vehicle, the following measures should be followed:
  - Face mask/covering to be worn.
  - Employees should not enter a work vehicle with others if they have any symptoms of COVID-19.
  - Keep windows of vehicles open, at least partially.
    Note - ventilation systems should not be set to recirculate air.
  - Practice good respiratory hygiene.
  - Sanitise hands before and after entering / exiting the vehicle.
- Key touch points in vehicles are to be wiped regularly during the day (e.g. door handles, steering wheel, handbrake, gear stick, radio controls). Adequate supplies of hygienic wipes and hand sanitiser must be available for this purpose.

Note: IPB has agreed to extend the Local Authorities motor fleet policy to provide business use for those employees using personal vehicles for the period of the emergency. The cover level is agreed Comprehensive Cover. Management should keep a record of the employee's name and private insurance policy number.

E.2 General Site Work Activities
- Employee should not attend site if they have COVID-19 symptoms and should be advised to leave the site and return to vehicle and follow HSE advice should they become unwell while at work.
- Business continuity of essential services should always be considered.
- Include COVID-19 controls in the site induction.
- Regular cleaning of site welfare facilities.
- Individual PPE where required must be kept separately from other employees and under no circumstances should it be shared.
- All tools and equipment should be properly sanitised to prevent cross contamination.
- Use ongoing toolbox talks to maintain awareness of employee responsibilities in the workplace in relation to COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures.
- Display HSE COVID-19 information notices at fixed sites.
- Hand cleaning facilities or hand sanitiser must be available.

E.3 Inductions, Toolbox Talks & Site Meetings
- Inductions, toolbox talks & site meetings should be conducted, if possible, in an open-air setting.
- Rooms should be well ventilated/windows open to allow fresh air circulation.
- Include COVID-19 controls in the site induction.

E.4 Contractors and Visitors to Site
- Visitors & Contractors visiting sites should be advised of and follow the onsite COVID-19 measures in place through the existing site induction.
- There is no longer a requirement to maintain a contact log with details of employees and visitors to the workplace. However, it may be continued as good practice for employers to keep such logs, as they may still need to provide details on attendance in the event the Department of Public Health has to investigate an outbreak.

E.5 Welfare Facilities / Eating on Construction Sites
- Implement appropriate COVID-19 hygiene regime and ensure adequate provision of cleaning materials.
- All rubbish should be disposed of appropriately.
- Tables should be cleared by employees when finished eating and cleaning between use.
- Employees should not share objects that touch their mouth, for example, bottles or cups.
- Ensure hands are washed before eating. Hand cleaning facilities or hand sanitiser must be available.
- COVID information posters should be displayed.

E.6 Management of Deliveries to Sites
- Where possible arrange for paperless delivery acceptance and request electronic copy of the delivery dockets.
- If signing for deliveries, employees should only use their own pens. In the case of electronic devices, both device and pen should be cleaned and disinfected prior to signing.

E.7 Changing Facilities, Showers, Drying
- Ensure enhanced cleaning of all changing and shower facilities.
- Provide suitable and sufficient bins in these areas with regular removal.

E.8 Tools, Plant & Equipment
- All tools and equipment should be properly sanitised to prevent cross contamination. Cleaning materials must be made available for this purpose.
- Sharing of tools and equipment should be avoided if possible.
- Consider provision of posters / stickers in the workplace to encourage employees to complete ongoing disinfection of tools and equipment that is shared.

E.9 COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment
- While correctly using PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other preventative measures. The most important action employees can take to protect themselves from COVID-19 is by following public health advice such as regular hand-washing and good respiratory hygiene.
- The requirements for PPE are to be determined in the first instance by risk assessment. The risk assessment will determine the type of PPE to be provided and to ensure that the PPE is appropriate to the risk.
- PPE needs to be properly worn where required. In addition, it must be regularly, cleaned, maintained and replaced as necessary. Hands should be sanitised before donning and after doffing PPE.
- Further information on PPE is available at: https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Personal_Protective_Equipment_-_PPE/.
- Local Authorities and employees should keep up to date with the latest Public Health advice in relation to the wearing of PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic, this is available from the HPSC website Home - Health Protection Surveillance Centre (hpsc.ie)

List of Appendices

APPENDIX 1
COVID-19 Suspect Cases at Work

What to do if an employee or a member of the public becomes unwell and believe they have been exposed to COVID-19.
The key message remains that an employee should not attend work if they are displaying any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or are feeling unwell. However, while an employee should not attend work if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19, the following outlines the steps employers should put in place to deal with a suspected case that may arise during the course of work.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in protecting the employee involved and their colleagues.

Local Authority must:
- Include a defined response structure that identifies the team(s) responsible for responding to a suspected case in the COVID-19 response plan.
- Appoint an appropriate manager (s) for dealing with suspected cases.
- Identify a designated isolation area in advance. This designated area and the route to the designated area should be accessible and as far as is reasonable and practicable should be accessible by people with disabilities.
- Take into account the possibility of one or more persons displaying the signs of COVID-19 and have additional areas available or another contingency plan for dealing with same.
- Ensure the designated area has the ability to isolate the person behind a closed door. Where a closed door is not possible, move to an area away from other employees. Provide as is reasonably practicable:
  - Ventilation i.e. via a window
  - Tissues, hand sanitiser, disinfectant and /or wipes
  - PPE; gloves and mask (medical grade or respirator mask).
  - Waste bags/bins.

If an employee displays symptoms of COVID-19 during work, the manager and the response team must:
- Isolate the employee and have a procedure in place to accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2 metres away from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from the symptomatic person at all times.
- Provide a mask for the person presenting with symptoms. If an employee displays symptoms of COVID-19 during work, a well fitted medical grade or respirator mask must be provided for the person presenting with symptoms. The person should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises.
- The employee should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises.
- Assess whether the unwell individual can immediately be directed to go home to call their doctor and continue treatment and self-isolation at home.
- If employee is not using own transport or not fit to travel alone, arrange transport home or to hospital for medical assessment if required. Public transport of any kind should not be used.
- Facilitate the person presenting with symptoms remaining in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and facilitate them calling their doctor. The employee should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects.

- Advice should be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the waste bag provided.
- Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery.
- Arrange for appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and work areas involved
- Provide advice and assistance if contacted by the Department of Public Health or the HSE in relation to contact tracing.

Further information on close contacts and testing is available from the HSE website Close contact - HSE.ie

Confirmed COVID-19 Case at Work

- If a confirmed case is identified in the workplace, the HSE will provide the relevant employee with advice.
- Those who have had close contact will be contacted by the HSE contact tracing team and advised on what steps will be taken.

For further information on close contact please see:
https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/close-contact-and-casual-contact.html#close

For further information on working arrangements and leave associated with COVID please see:
https://www.gov.ie/en/news/092fff-update-on-working-arrangements-and-leave-associated-with-covid-19-fo/

For further information on dealing with an outbreak of COVID19 (refer to HPSC general guide on management of COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace: Guidance of work place outbreaks.pdf (hpsc.ie))

APPENDIX 2

Latest Updates, Advice & Information

Employers are advised to keep up to date with information on COVID-19 by using the websites referred to below.

HSE - General Information about Covid-19	https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html
COVID-19 Latest Updates	https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/
Public Health Measures in place	gov.ie - Public health measures in place right now (www.gov.ie)
Department of Heath	https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/
Transitional Protocol: Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19	gov.ie - Transitional Protocol: Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 (www.gov.ie)
HSE Coronavirus (COVID-19) posters and resources	https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/
Health & Safety Authority Advice on COVID-19	https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid-19_coronavirus_information_and_resources/
Health Protection Surveillance Centre FAQ's	https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/frequentlyaskedquestions/
Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID-19 - In relation to working arrangements and temporary assignments across the Public Service	https://www.gov.ie/en/news/092fff-update-on-working-arrangements-and-leave-associated-with-covid-19-fo/
Guidance on the management of outbreaks	Guidance of work place outbreaks.pdf (hpsc.ie)
Data Protection –Work Safely Protocol	gov.ie - Data Protection - Work Safely Protocol (www.gov.ie)
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	https://www.dfa.ie/
General COVID-19 Travel Advisory	General COVID-19 Travel Advisory - Department of Foreign Affairs (dfa.ie)
World Health Organisation	Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (who.int)
European Centre for Disease Control	https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en
Managing Legionella Risks during the COVID-19 Pandemic	