Daily briefing on the government's response to COVID-19 - Friday 10 April 2020

Published: 10 April 2020
From: Department of the Taoiseach

- 1. Introduction and Public Health Advice
- 2. Wage Subsidy Scheme
- 3. Fuel Allowance
- 4. Community Measures and Supports
- 5. Volunteer funding
- 6. Courts remote services
- 7. Irish Abroad
- 8. Domestic Abuse
- 9. Emergency Service Resources
- 10. Overshopping
- 11. Phone Text Scam
- 12. Frontline Staff
- 13. Finally

Delivered by Elizabeth Canavan, Assistant Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach

Introduction and Public Health Advice

Good Morning Everyone.

As you know, we are at a really important point in our effort to slow the spread of the virus. How we act now is absolutely critical. While we know that this Easter weekend, it will be particularly difficult not to be with our families and friends, that is what we need to do now. So far everyone has pulled together, the vast majority of people are playing their part and it is making a difference. We need to keep pushing back against the virus and the best way we can
do that is to stay at home. Connect with your loved ones remotely this Easter to protect them and to protect yourself.

I will remind you again of the most effective personal actions you can take to help slow the spread of the virus:

- wash your hands regularly and thoroughly
- use good cough and sneeze etiquette
- observe social distancing measures

We need to keep up the good work – Thank you for all you are doing as part of the frontline.

---

**Wage Subsidy Scheme**

Take-up of The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme introduced by Government is continuing to grow.

Over 41,000 employers are now registered with Revenue for the scheme.

Over 219,000 employees having received one payment under the scheme, 80% of those having received top-up payments from their employer.

Generally, these payments are in the bank accounts of relevant employers the next working day. However, as I mentioned before, due to upcoming Easter weekend, subsidy payments for Good Friday and Easter Monday will not be processed until Tuesday 14 April.

One important thing we want to repeat is that to receive payments under the scheme, employers are required to set up a nominated Refund Bank Account on the Revenue On-Line System (ROS). While the majority of employers have set up a Refund Bank Account, as of yesterday Revenue were still unable to pay more than €2.7 million due to 570 employers who have not provided nominated bank account details.

Revenue has stressed the importance of any employer who is currently awaiting payment from Revenue to check that they have set up a nominated Refund Bank Account in ROS.
For guidance on how to set up a Refund Bank Account, go to [gov.ie](https://gov.ie).

---

**Fuel Allowance**

As previously noted, the fuel allowance season has been extended. Due to the fact that many recipients receive their payments on a fortnightly basis, not everyone will receive the first payment in the same week.

But rest assured all of those who are currently entitled to a fuel allowance will receive the 4 weekly payments amounting to €98 by Friday 8 May.

---

**Community Measures and Supports**

Yesterday, the Community Call Fora, which are providing help and support to those in need in communities around the country, received 1,190 calls and made 682 follow-up calls.

Requests varied from collections and deliveries of groceries, fuel, medicines and meals to social outreach, medical and health services.

The Fora helplines are partnering with ALONE, the national charity for older people. But their phone line during this crisis is for anyone who needs help.

A dedicated phone helpline is operational in every county as well as the national number 0818 222 024. You can find your local helpline number on [gov.ie](https://gov.ie).

If you need help or you know someone who needs help or you want to volunteer please don’t hesitate to call the ALONE helpline or the local helpline number and someone will direct your call.

A data hub, on which people can get more information about their local forum’s work and the national work, is now live and updated daily.

A link to the hub is available on: [gov.ie](https://gov.ie).
Volunteer funding

Yesterday a €2.5 million fund was launched to support community and volunteer groups participating in the Community Call initiative.

This fund will provide immediate resources to local and community groups who are providing vital assistance to vulnerable and cocooning people. These groups are making a real and significant difference at this time and we are glad that Government can work in partnership and collaboration with them in their efforts.

We want to thank everyone who is participating in this initiative, volunteers, community organisations and many public service organisations. It is a modern meitheal built on friendship and a coming together of our communities.

Courts remote services

We are seeing great progress in the efforts to increase courts capacity to hear cases in the very difficult circumstances arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The initial response of the courts was to ensure that urgent cases could be dealt with. They are now seeking to ensure, that not only urgent cases but as many cases as possible, can proceed in a remote setting.

Following successful testing of a system designed to facilitate remote hearings, over the next week or so a series of "test" hearings will take place remotely, across various court jurisdictions, with the assistance of solicitors, barristers and court staff.

If these hearings are successful it is hoped that remote hearings of actual cases will begin early in the next legal term. These hearings will be conducted fairly, safely and in full compliance with the law and all government guidance and regulations.

Irish Abroad
The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is engaged in the biggest repatriation effort in the history of the State.

86 Embassies and Consulates across the world, have assisted over 4,600 citizens in returning home to Ireland, the majority of these on commercial routes.

Where commercial flights are still an option, we recommend that people who wish to return to Ireland, do so as soon as possible.

An expanded call centre, established to assist with the crisis, has been staffed seven days a week, and has handled over 16,000 queries from citizens on the phone and on webchat at dfa.ie.

For Irish people abroad who have concerns, they can contact the helpline at country code 353 - 1 6131733.

**Domestic Abuse**

We have spoken previously about concerns in relation to an increase in the incidence of Domestic Abuse in times of crisis.

At a time when we have all been asked to stay home, we are very conscious that, for victims of domestic abuse, home may not be a safe place.

The government wishes to reassure victims of domestic abuse that support is still available despite COVID-19.

We want to put out a very clear message to anyone who may be suffering domestic abuse that:

- frontline support services are still available
- An Garda Síochána is prioritising response to domestic abuse
- other services like the Courts and the Legal Aid Board are ready to offer support where needed
And any restrictions on movement (the 2 kilometre rule) **do not apply** to a person trying to avoid risk of harm or seeking to access essential services.

Information on services and supports for victims is being made available through [gov.ie](http://gov.ie).

---

**Emergency Service Resources**

As we head into the long weekend, we would like everyone to bear in mind the additional strain that emergency services are under at this difficult time and to bear that in mind as they go about their weekend. It is important that we all try to avoid any activity that could potentially put the emergency services under additional pressure at this time.

---

**Overshopping**

We know that essential workers across the country are playing their part by keeping up the vital work needed at this time. In particular this morning we want to thank those workers who are keeping our food supply chain going.

This includes a broad range of people; farmers, producers, those working in distribution centres, hauliers, retail workers and many more, all of whom are ensuring that shop shelves are stacked that all necessities are available and will continue to be available for the duration of this crisis. Their work ensures that there is no need for people to stockpile or to panic buy. This will only upset the natural balance of supply and demand and lead to waste.

Our bin collection companies have already recorded a noticeable rise in the volume of unused food being thrown away as a result of overbuying at supermarkets in recent weeks.

While it is expected that we will be buying a little more than usual –we should still continue to be mindful of what we are buying and consuming and try to avoid over shopping.

Visit [Mywaste.ie](http://Mywaste.ie) for helpful information on segregating and preventing waste.
Phone Text Scam

We have spoken before about the need to be vigilant about scams and fraud at this time – unfortunately there are people who will try and take advantage of us during this emergency.

We are aware of reports about a contact tracing scam that involves people getting text messages saying they have been in contact with a confirmed case or with someone presenting with symptoms of COVID-19 and then are asked to click on a link.

Don’t click on this link. Delete the text immediately - you will not be contacted in this way as part of the contact tracing process.

At all times go to trusted sources for information – your GP, the HSE or gov.ie.

Frontline Staff

Before I finish today, we want to thank all of our essential workers who will be continuing to work over the weekend to keep the country going and to keep us all safe. But we also want to thank all of you who are working as part of the frontline in our strategy to manage this disease.

Finally

Shine Your Light

“Shine Your Light” is a National initiative that is calling on our communities everywhere to shine a light this Saturday, 11 April at 9pm to create a moment of solidarity in our battle against the COVID-19 pandemic.

We would like to thank everyone who is getting involved in this special initiative.

Please stay home this bank holiday weekend, unless it is to make a necessary journey for food, medical supplies or to assist the vulnerable. You can enjoy the good weather by exercising within 2 kilometres of your home. By staying home, we will save lives.
Thank you.