



10 March 2020.

Dear provider,

I am writing to give you an update on the policies of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs with regard to Covid-19. This should be treated as the most up to date position and replaces previous advice provided on PIP (30 Jan, 11 Feb, 28 Feb, 2 March and 3 March). I have attached guidance for pre-schools and schools issued by the HSE on 5 March. The Department of Health is updating information on Covid-19 on a daily basis. Please ensure that you closely monitor the HSE website (www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html) to get accurate, up-to-date information.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs will keep providers informed of childcare specific developments via a number of channels:

- PIP and EYP Hive notices directly to providers, and
- Emails (such as this) directly to providers.

Services funded by the DCYA will be available to provide support and advice. These include:

- City and County Childcare Committees, and
- Early Childhood Ireland, National Childhood Network, Childminding Ireland,

Other stakeholder organisations which are members of the Early Years Forum may also be able to provide support. These include the Association of Childhood Professionals, Seas Suas and the National Forum for Community Childcare Services.

Childcare stakeholder engagement

DCYA has nominated Early Childhood Ireland and Childminding Ireland to the national stakeholder group on Covid-19 which was recently established by the Department of the Taoiseach. DCYA understands that IBEC, ICTU and SIPTU are also part of another stakeholder group the Department of the Taoiseach is consulting with.

HSE advice for pre-schools

As you will see from the attached HSE 'Guidance for staff in childcare and education settings about novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)' of 5 March, there is currently no plan to close pre-schools or schools in Ireland on a blanket basis. This policy is being kept under review and may change.

I would urge you to read the Guidance note in full – the key issues for childcare providers include the following:

- If a childcare provider is asked to close by the HSE Public Health service

If an individual childcare provider is asked to close by the HSE, they should do so and must contact Pobal and the local CCC to notify them of the date of the closure.

- If an individual staff member or child is asked to self-isolate

For now, only children and staff members who are directed to by the HSE need to self-isolate. In this instance, they should follow the advice provided about caring for themselves and reducing risk of spread of the virus.

- If a service has a suspected case of Covid 19

The HSE advice for a service with a suspected case of Covid-19 (child or staff) is as follows:

- For those who are in contact with a person suspected of having COVID-19 in an early learning and care or school age childcare service, no restrictions or special control measures are required while laboratory test results for COVID-19 are awaited.
 - There is no need to close the setting or to send children or staff home. Until the outcome of test results is known, there is no action that staff members need to take other than to continue to follow the guidance on hygiene and preventative measures provided by the HSE.
 - People who test negative for COVID-19 will be advised individually about return to early learning and care, education or work.
 - The HSE will contact you if any additional steps need to be taken (for example, in the event of a positive result). Services are asked to follow the advice / instruction provided in those situations.
- If a child or staff member becomes unwell in your service

Where a child or staff member feels unwell and develops symptoms of cough, fever or shortness of breath whilst in an early learning and care or school age childcare service, the following is advised:

- For children in your care who develop symptoms of cough, fever or shortness of breath, you should contact their parent or guardian and ask them to contact their GP.
- If an adult reports feeling unwell, ask them to contact their GP.
- In an emergency, call the ambulance, and explain the symptoms of the child or staff member.
- While you wait for the parent or guardian to arrive, or for further advice, or for the ambulance to arrive, try to find somewhere safe for the unwell person to sit. They should remain at least two metres away from other people, if possible.
- If possible, find a room or area where they can be isolated behind a shut door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window, do so for ventilation.

- They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and be advised to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the bin.
- If no bin is available, put the tissue in a bag or pocket for disposing in a bin later. If you don't have any tissues available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow. The room will need to be cleaned once they leave. Advice on cleaning is available on the HSE website and in the appendix attached.
- If they need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, they should use a separate bathroom if available.
- If the child / adult tests positive for the virus, the HSE will contact you if any additional steps need to be taken. Services are asked to follow the advice / instruction provided in those situations.

Handwashing / Coughing / Sneezing

The HSE advise that practicing good hygiene is the best way to protect yourself from Covid-19:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for a minimum of 15 seconds, or use an alcohol based hand rub if hand washing is not available
- If you are coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Throw the used tissue away into a closed bin, and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your flexed (bent) elbow.
- The Department of Education and Skills has produced a useful poster on respiratory and hand hygiene for primary schools which you may want to print out and display in your service: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/primary-poster.pdf>

Maintaining service provision

Unless instructed to close, the advice at present is that services should remain open, whilst following the guidance available on hygiene and preventative measures. Any service with a particular concern about remaining open should contact the HSE on **1850 241850**.

Funding for services

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is aware that providers are concerned about the potential financial impact of closures on their service/ business and their staff. The following is the current policy:

- If a service is directed to close by the HSE, for all DCYA programmes, DCYA will approve closure on force majeure grounds, so that subvention will continue to be paid.

This will cover ECCE, NCS and the legacy schemes (CCS, TEC). The service will not be required to make up days for those closed due to approved force majeure.

- Any other application for force majeure will be considered on a case by case basis, in accordance with current practice. Any such force majeure requests will need to be supported by strong evidence that closure was necessary.
- If a parent chooses to keep a child at home due to illness, or fear of illness, the usual rules apply with regard to payment for attendance:
 - In the case of ECCE, CCSP and TEC, children can be absent for up to 4 weeks without any loss of funding for the service. If a child or their parent is ill, or self-isolating due to Covid-19, they can apply to their CCC for approval for an additional 8 weeks of subvention while the child is absent.
 - If a child is absent for more than 4 weeks, without any illness, the CCCs will consider requests for continued funding on a case by case basis. If the absence is due to a parent keeping their child at home due to fear of illness, the CCCs will take this into consideration when considering the request.
 - In the case of a child with AIM supports (e.g. level 7 additional staffing, or nursing support provided by the HSE), depending on the circumstances Pobal may extend funding beyond the initial 4 weeks of absence. An additional two weeks absence will be granted with the approval of the CCC. For absences longer than 6 weeks the service provider should contact the Pobal AIM team by emailing aimteam@pobal.ie.
 - In the case of the NCS, applications for leave to be absent for more than 4 weeks should be made to Pobal using the Early Years Platform Hive, stating the reason for the request. Such applications will be considered in line with the criteria set out above for ECCE and other schemes.

The Department is keeping this policy under review, and will issue updates in the case of any changes.

Pobal, Better Start, Tusla and Department of Education and Skills services

Pobal's compliance team, Tusla's EY Inspectorate, the Department of Education and Skills Early Years Inspectorate and Better Start personnel are all following HSE guidance in relation to Covid-19 and are monitoring the situation closely.

The Early Years Inspectorate in Tusla has advised the Department that it is continuing to conduct inspections of early learning and care services as normal. The Inspectorate is following the HSE guidance in relation to COVID-19 and is monitoring the situation closely.

The Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate has also advised that inspection activity in Early Learning and Care settings will continue as normal. All DES Inspectors will follow the HSE advice in the conduct of their inspection work in settings.

Pobal CAR and Better Start services will also continue as normal. Their staff will follow HSE advice.

Both the Departments, Pobal and the Tusla Inspectorate recognise that this is an evolving situation and that there may be operational issues arising for providers as a result. The inspectorates will take account of HSE guidance issued to providers in the management of its service. Further updates to the sector will issue as required.

Some providers have had queries with Tusla on the use of gels and hand sanitisers. While they do not replace hand washing, they can be used to complement hand washing in the prevention of cross infection. On entering a service the inspectors will ask to wash their hands.

As stated before, DCYA is actively monitoring the situation and will continue to take whatever action is appropriate to protect and support children and services. Further updates will be shared as they arise.

Government support for business, the self-employed and employees

Advice and support relating to the sustainability of your childcare service remains available from your local CCC and from Pobal. Financial support is also currently available for community services. Private and community services experiencing difficulties should immediately contact their CCC and Pobal and they will be dealt with under the Case Management process.

In addition to these childcare sector specific supports, childcare providers should note the latest Government advice for business, employers and employees.

The Government on 9 March announced a package of €2.4 billion for income support, the main elements of which are:

- Waiving the requirement for six waiting days for sick pay / benefit in respect of medically certified cases of self-isolation in accordance with public health guidelines;
- The removal of the means test requirement for Supplementary Welfare Allowance in respect of medically certified cases of self-isolation;
- To contain the transmission of Covid-19, the personal rate of Illness Benefit will be increased from €203 per week to €305 per week for a maximum period of two weeks of medically certified self-isolation, or for the duration of a person's medically-certified absence from work due to Covid-19 diagnoses;
- Self-employed people will be entitled to receive either illness benefit or non-means tested supplementary welfare allowance.

Other actions to help reduce the wider economic impact include:

- The provision of a €200 million liquidity support fund for impacted firms;
- The existing systematic short-time working scheme is available for employees who may be placed on reduced working arrangements;
- A group will be established involving union and employer representatives, as well as relevant Government Departments and agencies to monitor labour market developments and to lead a joint national communications effort focused on employers and employees (including vulnerable workers, migrant workers and undocumented workers);

Government Ministers will also meet the banks and other important economic actors to ensure there is a joined-up national effort to mitigate the adverse economic impact of the virus.

Vulnerable children and families with increased flexibility requirements

Some of you may look after children who have medical needs. We would ask that you talk with their parents about whether any special measures are required at this time. DCYA is asking the small number of providers supporting children with complex medical needs under AIM to follow the advice of the funded health professional that supports the child's participation in ECCE.

DCYA is also aware that in the event of a deterioration of the situation, some communities may be called upon to offer extra support to essential front-line workers. We are aware that you may already be providing a service to these individuals and we would ask you to consider whether any increased flexibility or hours of service may be possible, should exceptional circumstances arise.

This is a worrying time for everyone, but please be assured that the priority of this Department has and always will be the well-being of children and those providing services to them. Thank you for your ongoing efforts and commitment to act in the best interest of children, families and your colleagues in the workforce.

If you have any queries about the Covid 19 and your service please contact your local CCC.

Regards

Early Years Division



**Guidance for staff in childcare and educational settings, including language schools
about novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

V1.1.05.03.2020

This guidance will assist educational settings, including language schools, and childcare settings in providing advice for staff and host families on the following:

- the novel coronavirus, COVID-19,
- how to help prevent spread of all respiratory infections including COVID-19,
- what advice to give to individuals who have travelled from countries where COVID-19 is circulating within the last 14 days
- what to do if someone confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19 has been in a school or other educational setting, or is staying with a host family
- what advice to give to individuals who have travelled from countries with ongoing transmission within the last 14 days
- advice on how to clean /disinfect areas where there has been a case of COVID-19 in an educational or childcare setting

Information on COVID-19

There is an ongoing outbreak of a novel Coronavirus which began in China. Infections have been reported in several other countries. A list of countries where COVID-19 is circulating in the community can be found [here](#).

The HSE HPSC is monitoring the situation and updating its website www.hpsc.ie daily.

Coronaviruses

Coronaviruses are a large group of viruses that can cause illnesses. Some of these illnesses are very mild, like the common cold, while others are more severe, like SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome).

Novel coronavirus COVID-19

A “novel coronavirus” means a new type of coronavirus that has never been seen in humans before. The coronavirus recently identified in China is one of these. The infection caused by this new coronavirus is being named COVID-19.

Symptoms of COVID-19

It can take up to 14 days from exposure to the virus for the symptoms of COVID-19 to appear. These symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Treatment of novel coronavirus COVID-19

There is no specific treatment for 2019-nCoV at present, but the symptoms of the virus can be treated.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 can spread from person to person, usually after close contact with a person infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 for example in a household, healthcare facility or workplace.

The virus can be spread either:

- directly, through contact with an infected person’s body fluids (e.g. droplets from coughing or sneezing) or
- indirectly, through contact with surfaces that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and which are, therefore, contaminated with the virus. It is still not known how long the virus survives on surfaces, although current information suggests the virus may survive a few hours. Simple household disinfectants can kill the virus.

How to protect yourself from novel coronavirus 2019-nCoV

- [Wash your hands often with soap and water](#) or use an alcohol based hand rub if hand washing is not available
- [If you are coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.](#) Throw the used tissue away into a closed bin, and wash your hands. If you don’t have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your flexed (bent) elbow.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who you know has cold or flu symptoms.

- Check the [travel advisories from the Department of Foreign Affairs](#) prior to arranging travel abroad.

HSE HPSC has a [suite of materials](#) that contains public health advice about how to help stop the spread of viruses, like those that cause COVID-19, by practicing good respiratory and hand hygiene. Face masks for the general public, students, staff or host families are **not recommended** to protect from infection, as there is no evidence of benefit from their use outside healthcare environments.

Advice for students and staff who have travelled to Ireland from abroad

If the student or staff:

- have not been in any of [these countries](#) in the last 14 days
AND
- have not been in contact with a person with COVID-19
AND
- have not attended a healthcare facility where patients with novel coronavirus are being treated in another country

Then no specific measures are needed.

IF WITHIN THE LAST 14 DAYS;

- the student or staff have been [in any of these countries](#)
OR
- have been in contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19
OR
- have attended a healthcare facility in another country where patients with COVID-19 are being treated

If the student or staff member is **WELL** (no fever, cough or shortness of breath), they should visit the [HSE website](#) and call the HSE helpline: Callsave 1850 24 1850, Phone 041 6850300 for further advice

If they are well and have been to any of [these countries](#) in the last 14 days:

- There is no need for quarantine (they do not need to be kept separate from others)
- They can attend college/university or work as normal
- They should watch out for symptoms of respiratory illness for 14 days. If they develop any respiratory symptoms they should phone their GP/student health service/Emergency Department for advice.
- They should tell the doctor their symptoms and where they have travelled

If they have been in contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 or attended a health care facility in another country where people were treated for COVID-19:

- They should contact the helpline above for further advice
- They should stay at home until they have received advice.

IF WITHIN THE LAST 14 DAYS;

- The student or staff member have been [any of these countries](#) OR
 - have been in contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- OR
- have attended a healthcare facility in another country where patients with COVID-19 are being treated

If THE STUDENT OR STAFF MEMBER IS **UNWELL** (fever, cough, shortness of breath)

If a student or staff member develops symptoms of fever, cough, or shortness of breath they should:

- Self-isolate in a room with a phone by themselves.
- **Phone their GP or student health service (for students) or emergency department for medical advice, rather than turning up in person**
- Make sure that, when they phone, they mention that they have recently travelled to an affected region. The doctor will arrange to get medical help.
- While they wait for help, they should stay at home.
- Not go out to public places
- Not go to school, college/university or work

Make sure that children and students know to tell a member of staff if they feel unwell.

If a student or staff member is in school at the time that they feel unwell and develop symptoms:

- For children in your care, who develop symptoms of cough, fever or shortness of breath while in school, call their parent or guardian and ask them to contact their GP and explain that they may have had exposure to COVID-19
- If an older student or adult reports feeling unwell, ask them to contact their GP and explain that they may have been exposed to COVID-19
- In an emergency, call the ambulance, and explain that the student or staff member is unwell and may have had exposure to COVID-19

While you wait for the parent or guardian to arrive, or for further advice, or for the ambulance to arrive, try to find somewhere safe for the unwell person to sit. They should remain at least two metres away from other people.

- If possible, find a room or area where they can be isolated behind a shut door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window, do so for ventilation.
- They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and be advised to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the bin.
- If no bin is available, put the tissue in a bag or pocket for disposing in a bin later. If you don't have any tissues available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow. The room will need to be cleaned once they leave.
- If they need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, they should use a separate bathroom if available.

**IF A CASE OF COVID-19 (PUPIL, STUDENT OR STAFF) IS SUSPECTED IN YOUR
CHILDCARE OR EDUCATION SETTING**

- For those who are in contact with a person suspected of having COVID-19 in a childcare or educational setting, no restrictions or special control measures are required while laboratory test results for COVID-19 are awaited.

- There is no need to close the setting or to send other students or staff home. Until the outcome of test results is known there is no action that staff members need to take.
- People who test negative for COVID-19 will be advised individually about return to education or work.
- Your local Department of Public Health will contact you if any additional steps need to be taken
- Contact the contact HSELive on [1850 24 1850](tel:1850241850) for further advice if in doubt.

**WHAT TO DO IF A CASE OF COVID-19 (PUPIL, STUDENT OR STAFF) IS
CONFIRMED IN YOUR CHILDCARE OR EDUCATION
SETTING**

The school, childcare or educational setting will be contacted by local Public Health staff of the HSE to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken.

An assessment of each school, childcare or education setting will be undertaken by HSE public health staff.

Advice on the management of pupils or students and staff will be based on this assessment.

The HSE public health staff will also be in contact individually with anyone who has been in contact with the person with COVID-19 to provide them with appropriate advice.

Advice on cleaning of communal areas such as classrooms, changing rooms and toilets will be given by Public Health and is outlined later in this document.

Advice for Host Families

If a student has not been in [any of these countries](#) in the last 14 days

AND

- has not been in contact with a person with novel coronavirus

AND

- has not attended a healthcare facility where patients with novel coronavirus are being treated in another country

Then no specific measures are needed.

If a student **has been** in [any of these countries](#)

OR

- has been in contact with a person diagnosed with novel coronavirus

OR

- has attended a healthcare facility in another country where patients with novel coronavirus are being treated

If they develop symptoms of cough, fever or shortness of breath, they should:

- Self-isolate in a room with a phone by themselves.
- **Phone their GP or student health service (for students) or emergency department for medical advice, rather than turning up in person**
 - Make sure that, when they phone, they mention that they have recently travelled to an affected region. The doctor will arrange to get medical help.
 - While they wait for help, they should stay at home.
 - Not go out to public places
 - Not go to school, college/university or work

Your local Public Health Department will be in contact with you to advise you of any further steps that need to be taken while the person is being investigated for COVID-19

If they are [WELL](#) (no fever, cough or shortness of breath), they should visit the [HSE website](#) and call the HSE helpline: Callsave 1850 24 1850, Phone 041 6850300 for further advice

For those who are well and have been in [any of these countries](#) in the last 14 days:

- There is no need for quarantine (they do not need to be kept separate from others)
- They can attend college/university or work as normal
- They should watch out for symptoms of respiratory illness for 14 days. If they develop any respiratory symptoms they should phone their GP/student health service/Emergency Department for advice.
- They should tell their doctor their symptoms and where they have travelled

For those who are well and who have been in contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 or attended a health care facility in another country where people were treated for COVID-19:

- They should contact the helpline above for further advice
- They should stay at home until they have received advice.

ADVICE ON HOW TO CLEAN EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT WHERE THERE WERE CHILDREN, STUDENTS OR STAFF WITH SUSPECTED COVID-19

Evidence to date suggests that transmission of Coronavirus from one person to another is more likely to occur when someone has close contact (within 2 metres) with an infected person. The risk increases the longer that person is in close contact with the infected individual.

The virus is most likely to pass to others when large respiratory droplets containing the virus are passed directly to the mouth, eyes or noses of people who are in close contact with an infected person who is actively coughing and sneezing.

It is also possible although it is probably a lesser risk that a person may become infected when they touch an object or surface that has been contaminated by respiratory secretions from an infected person and they then touch their own mouth, nose or eyes, for example when they touch a door handle and then rub their eyes or put something in their mouth.

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 72 hours.

Regular cleaning of frequently –touched hard surfaces and hands will therefore help to reduce the risk of infection.

There is little evidence that people who do not have any respiratory symptoms can transmit the virus to others.

Once a pupil with suspected COVID-19 is identified in a school or childcare setting all surfaces that the pupil has been in contact with should be cleaned and disinfected.

General tips for cleaning/disinfecting rooms that pupils with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 were isolated in.

- Keep the door to the room closed for at least one hour before cleaning. Do not use the room until the room has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry.
- The person assigned to clean the area should avoid touching their face while they are cleaning and should wear household or disposable single use non-sterile nitrile gloves and a disposable plastic apron (if one is available).
- Open the window while you are cleaning.
- Clean the environment and the furniture using disposable cleaning cloths and a household detergent followed or combined with Chlorine based product such as sodium hypochlorite (often referred to as household bleach). Chlorine based products are available in different formats including wipes.

- If you are not familiar with chlorine based disinfectants then please refer to the HPSC Management of Infectious Diseases in Schools available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/az/lifestages/schoolhealth/>
- Pay special attention to frequently touched flat surfaces, the backs of chairs, couches, door handles and any surfaces or items that are visibly soiled with body fluids.
- Place all waste that has been in contact with the pupil, including used tissues, and masks if used, in a plastic rubbish bag and tie when full. Remove your apron and gloves and discard into the waste bag and clean your hands. Place the plastic bag into a second bin bag and tie it, then clean your hands.
- Store the bag in a safe place until the result of the test is available. If the pupil tests negative, place the waste in the normal domestic waste bin. In the event the pupil tests positive, Public Health will advise what to do next.
- Once the room has been cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry, the room can be put back into use.
- There is no need to clean carpets (if present) unless there has been a spillage.

Cleaning of communal areas

- If a the pupil spent time in a communal area like a classroom, dormitory, play area or they 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.