COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR FERRIES TO OFF-SHORE ISLANDS

v1.1. 07.09.2021

This guidance document gives general advice about preventing the spread of COVID-19 for transport services (such as ferries) to the offshore islands in Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Cork

It highlights some specific relevant information and signposts to relevant advice/guidance available on the HSE, Department of Health and/or Government websites. Government advice changes according to latest developments – please ensure you keep up to date by following published advice from the Government and the HSE.

Any specific queries in relation to COVID-19 and measures to mitigate its impact on the maritime transport sector should be sent to MaritimeCovid@transport.gov.ie All other general queries in relation to the maritime sector should be sent through the normal channels of communication.

For Guidance in relation to International Ferries please see:
Department of Transport Guidance - Covid-19 agreed protocol for International Ro-Ro Passenger Transport Services, Ports & Terminal Service Operators February 2021

LATEST UPDATES

• Department of Health COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Health advice
  ▪ this includes Advice for Employers and Employees from DEASP
• HSE Coronavirus (COVID-19)
• Department of Transport Covid-19 agreed protocol for International Ro-Ro Passenger Transport Services, Ports & Terminal Service Operators (February 2021)
• HPSC Guidance on the Use of Face Coverings by the General Public (April 2021)
• EU Healthy Gateways - Interim advice for preparedness and response to cases of COVID-19 on board ferries after lifting restrictive measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (v2 May 2021)
Background

COVID-19 is caused by the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and is spread mainly through the air from the respiratory tract (nose or mouth) of a person with the infection. The virus can reach the respiratory tract mucosa (eyes, nose and mouth) of a susceptible person in two ways:

1. Travelling directly through the air to the respiratory tract or
2. Indirectly as a result of contamination of hands or other surfaces and subsequent transfer to the respiratory mucosa.

The risk of transmission through the air is dependent on a number of factors and include, how much virus is being shed by the infectious person, how close the susceptible person is to the infectious person, how forcefully the infectious person is scattering particles (for example, when the infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, sings, shouts or laughs) and what barriers are in place (e.g. masks).

- There is an increased risk of catching COVID-19 when:
  - you come into close contact (<2 metres/6 feet) with someone who has the virus
  - you touch – e.g. with your hands - surfaces or objects that are contaminated with the virus, and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes without having washed your hands thoroughly.
  - People gather together, especially in over-crowded, poorly-ventilated settings.

Keep this in mind. It will help you remember all the things you need to do to protect yourself and others from the virus.

COVID-19 Pandemic in Ireland 2021

These guidelines have been updated to reflect the evolving situation in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the vaccination programme in Ireland. Effective vaccines against COVID-19 are now available and the vaccination programme is well advanced in Ireland. However, there is still an ongoing risk of COVID-19 especially due to the emergence of new variants. Precautions to prevent introduction and spread of the virus are therefore still required even in the context of community vaccination.

Although the COVID-19 vaccine has been proven to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 and reduce the risk of severe disease or hospitalisation, it does not prevent all infection. Additionally, there is now some concern that the vaccine may be less effective against some virus variants. For this reason, to help manage that risk, existing recommended infection prevention and control measures should remain in place.
This document outlines the measures that should now be adopted in order to enable travel to and from offshore islands to take place in a safe manner. Current Government Guidelines must be adhered to for all public transport.

This guidance document should be read and interpreted in conjunction with the Irish Government COVID-19 “Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19” risk management strategy.

For more information on COVID-19, please click here.
Stopping the spread of COVID-19

The best way to protect yourself and others against COVID-19:

- If you are experiencing symptoms, self-isolate and do not use public transport. Please arrange a COVID-19 test or call your GP.
- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
  by doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or bent elbow when coughing or sneezing, and discard used tissue safely
- Attending for vaccination when eligible
- By law, you have to wear a face covering:
  - On public transport
  - In shops, shopping centres, healthcare settings, and some other indoor settings
  - Wearing cloth face coverings may help prevent people who do not know they have COVID-19 from spreading it to others.
- Maintain social distancing
  - Distance yourself at least 2 metres away from other people, especially those who might be unwell
  - Limit your contact with others when out and about
  - Keep your close contacts to a small number of people
  - Limit the amount of time you spend in direct contact with other people (especially indoors)
  - Avoid crowded areas and ensure adequate ventilation. If an area looks busy, go somewhere else or return at a quieter time

All HPSC guidance should be read and interpreted in conjunction with the [Government’s Framework of Restrictions](https://www.hpsc.ie).
How do these measures apply to ferries to the offshore islands?

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht provides subsidised support via public service contracts for a broad range of ferry services – passenger ferries, light and heavy cargo services, and roll-on/roll-off ferries – to offshore islands in Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Cork. Many of the offshore islands have subsidised public transport services, which carry passengers; there are also private operators on some routes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offshore Islands and services provided via DCHG support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Service providers operate vessels with varying maximum passenger carrying capacity, e.g. between 12 and 36 for smaller islands (mainly in Cork), 96 for Árainn Mhór (Donegal), and 294 for services to the Aran Islands (Galway). For some vessels, this is mostly indoor seating. [https://www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2018/08/21-subsidised-ferry-services-to-the-offshore-islands.pdf](https://www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2018/08/21-subsidised-ferry-services-to-the-offshore-islands.pdf)

It is public transport, but also – at times, by sheer virtue of numbers – it can be a mass gathering of people within an indoor space.

Any transport service provider would therefore need to look at how it would implement the measures outlined by Government in response to COVID-19 in order to achieve social distancing and protect staff and passengers, while ensuring that the service can continue.
What ferry services can do to help protect customers and employees

Social distancing and Mask Wearing

- Look at strategies to avoid crowding of passengers on ferries (e.g. encourage internet/phone booking by travellers so it’s easier to manage numbers)
- Remind passengers that mask wearing is a legal requirement
- Consider reduced passenger numbers to enable at least 1 metre/3 feet space (ideally 2m/6ft) between
- Encourage passengers to avoid crowds in any confined space on the ferry and in waiting areas
- Have a clear system to manage passenger traffic on and off ferries
- For roll-on/roll-off ferries – allow customers to remain in their vehicles for the duration of the journey, if on an open vehicle deck
- Reduce cash handling between customers and staff as much as possible

Raise awareness – remind staff to:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub if hands are not visibly dirty
- Wash hands before eating, drinking, smoking, preparing food and using the toilet and arriving at the workplace after using public transport
- Practice good respiratory hygiene, i.e. when coughing and sneezing, cover their mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – discard tissue immediately into a closed bin and clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth – if someone touches their eyes, nose or mouth with contaminated hands, they can transfer the virus from the surface to themselves
- Exercise a common sense approach to interaction with passengers and other staff, e.g. avoid shaking hands, avoid making close contact if possible, especially with those who are coughing and sneezing
- Stay home if they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or have been advised to restrict their movement or self-isolate.

Raise awareness – share information

- Display COVID-19 information/advice posters from the HSE or Department of Health in prominent places – on the ferry, in waiting rooms, booking offices etc. – including posters advising what to do if people feel unwell
- Use Department of Health floor graphics explaining social distancing as part of COVID-19 - onboard the ferry, in waiting rooms/ booking offices etc, to help people to maintain distance in these areas
- Put notices on the back of toilet doors advising staff and patrons to wash hands thoroughly
- Issue reminder messages over the Tannoy/speaker system at regular intervals (e.g. about queuing at safe distances, using bins provided for tissues etc.)
- Show COVID-19 information videos or screen posters on TV screens
### Covid-19 Videos and Posters

#### COVID-19 videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why is Soap so Effective against COVID-19? <a href="https://youtu.be/vVzHGLqfSYU">https://youtu.be/vVzHGLqfSYU</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE YouTube channel</td>
<td>Learn about hand hygiene and preventing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) <a href="https://youtu.be/5JYhm9oa-DM">https://youtu.be/5JYhm9oa-DM</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### COVID-19 posters

Click on **Language** at the top right hand corner of the screen/webpage for Irish language versions

|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cough hygiene | ‘Cover your cough and sneeze’: [https://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPS01325.pdf](https://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPS01325.pdf)  
[https://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPS01324.pdf](https://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPS01324.pdf)  
| Hand hygiene | Hand hygiene posters in Irish and English [https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner- resources/](https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/) |
Cleaning regimen and hygiene measures

- Take a pro-active approach in undertaking extra cleaning and sanitation in terminals/waiting areas, in booking offices and on board ferries
- Increase the frequency and extent of cleaning regimes and ensure that they include:
  - Extra measures to clean and disinfect all touch points (touch point cleaning focuses on common areas and locations that are touched frequently by people throughout the day - such as hand rails, railings, sanitary facilities)
  - Clean and disinfect all hard surfaces in high-contact areas such as:
    - Door handles, grab rails/ hand rails in corridors/stairwells, plastic-coated or laminated worktops, access touchpads, payment PIN pads, ticket machines, telephones/ keyboards in offices, and toilets/taps/sanitary fittings
  - Clean and disinfect regularly touched objects and surfaces clean using a general-purpose detergent. If surfaces are soiled with blood or body fluids, clean first then wipe down with a disinfectant such as bleach or use a 2:1 combined product (see more here)
  - Wear rubber gloves when cleaning surfaces, wash the gloves while still wearing them, then wash your hands after you take them off
- Ensure soap and hot running water, paper towels for drying hands and bins for disposal of paper towels in all toilet facilities/ washrooms (not shared towels WHO myth-busters)
- Install hand-sanitation points with alcohol-based hand sanitiser (at least 60% alcohol) in passenger areas (e.g. at points of entry to/exit from the ferry, beside any food/drink outlet, in the toilets) and booking offices/ waiting rooms - encourage passengers & staff to use these
- Ensure sufficient bins available for disposal of tissues (preferably covered bins, lined with a bin bag, replace when three-quarters full) disinfectant desk wipes in booking offices/ reception desks.

Please see HPSC “Cleaning guidance for use in non-healthcare settings: General cleaning principles, and cleaning guidance when a person with COVID-19 has been in the setting” for more information.

Help with timely Contact Tracing

In the event of a person with COVID-19 travelling on a ferry, Public Health doctors and teams will need specific information on passengers/ crew who were on the same ferry in order to quickly assess the risk to others travelling.

Having a list of people travelling on each ferry with each person’s name, contact phone number and email address (ideally in MS Excel spreadsheet format) would help Public Health doctors and teams to trace contacts much more quickly – speed is essential here to help prevent onward transmission of infection.
Dealing with someone who possibly has COVID-19

Anyone who is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should not be travelling or working

However, in instances where this is necessary (e.g. needing access to testing/ healthcare on the mainland), the following should apply:

- Ensure employees on-board know what to do to manage the situation safely in order to minimise contact between passengers and crew with the ill person
- If the ill passenger has been initially assessed on the island by the National Ambulance Service (NAS), they may be travelling in a NAS car and/or have a NAS crew member with them who will be able to advise on and help institute appropriate measures
- The ill passenger should ideally be separated from others by a physical distance of 2 m (6 ft). Where this is not possible, a distance of at least 1 metre is recommended.
- If travelling via car on a roll-on/roll-off ferry, this self-isolation could be in the car during the ferry crossing to minimise contact with other passengers and crew
- If a passenger-only ferry, it may be necessary to identify a space on the ferry where the ill traveller can be separated from other passengers and crew by 2m (6 ft) – preferably in the open air (weather permitting), or an area with shelter on open deck
- For the ill passenger –
  - Use of a surgical face mask is recommended, if available and can be tolerated
  - If a surgical face mask is not available or cannot be tolerated, the ill traveller should be asked to cover their mouth and nose with tissues when sneezing or coughing and isolated from other passengers or staff
  - Used masks and tissues should be disposed of safely, and toilets cleaned after use
  - The ill passenger should be asked to wash hands frequently during the journey

Is there a risk from transporting freight or cargo on board the ferry?

From experience with other coronaviruses, we know that these types of viruses don’t survive long on objects, such as letters or parcels.

Is there a risk from transporting pets on board the ferry?

At this time, there is no evidence that companion animals including pets can spread COVID-19. For more information on COVID-19, please click here.