
Daily briefing on the government's response to COVID-19 - Friday 27 March 2020

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From: [Department of the Taoiseach](#)

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

Good Morning Everyone

Let's begin once again by revisiting the vital public health guidance being issued at this time.

Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly.

Observe Social Distancing

Cannot overstate the importance of keeping a 2 metre distance between people at this stage, vital in helping slow down the spread of the disease.

If you are experiencing symptoms, self-isolate to protect others and contact your GP.

We can't stop the virus, but together, we can reduce the impact it has on our families and communities, our health service and our day to day lives.

People may be aware that the National Public Health Emergency Team is meeting this morning. If anything arises we will update later on today.

It was heartening last night to see the nation come together at 8pm to applaud our health workers and thank them for their bravery and commitment.

Further to this Government arranged yesterday for student nurses and midwives completing placement during the COVID- 19 outbreak to be paid for the duration of the emergency in recognition of their hard work and dedication at the frontline of this pandemic.

Income/Business Supports

We are also continuing to prepare and provide for the shock of the economic impact of this pandemic and we want to continue to make people aware of the supports being provided by Government at this time.

The [Wage Subsidy Scheme](#) was introduced just last Tuesday and already today, Revenue are generating refunds to Employers using the new scheme.

If you are an employer who has been impacted by COVID-19 we encourage you to register for the Wage Subsidy Scheme now.

Revenue has issued detailed guidance on eligibility for the temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme on their [website](#) .

The declaration by the employer when applying for the scheme is not a declaration of insolvency.

The declaration is based on self-assessment principles and is based on reasonable projections.

Additionally, Revenue does not consider that any employer will require professional advice or assistance in being able to prove that these criteria are met. Click [here](#) for more information.

We want to continue to remind employers who have recently laid off workers that they can also avail of that Scheme by re-employing those staff.

If you are an employee who has been impacted by COVID-19, there are a range of income supports available to you. You can learn more about those supports and apply for them by clicking [here](#) .

Employees whose employers have re-employed them on foot of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Payment and who now wish to close their application for the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment, can find helpful links [here](#) .

We have experienced unprecedented demand for income supports including the [COVID 19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment](#) and Jobseeker payments since 13 March.

The level of demand equates to 10 months normal claim-load in just 10 working days. Those claims are being processed as fast as possible. Payments for 90% of claims received by last Thursday 19 March were issued last Friday and reached bank accounts this Tuesday 24 March. Likewise nearly all payments received by close of business yesterday will be put into payment today. People who have issues with their applications which may prolong payment time will be contacted directly.

We also want to recognise and support the huge number of Irish people who are still working and who are now, and for the coming weeks will be, working from home in the interest of reducing the spread of COVID-19. For many people this will be a new experience and it is important to continue to prioritise your health no matter where you are working. To help with this, the Health and Safety Authority have published an FAQ for employers and employees in relation to home-working. Link to this FAQ is [here](#)

Community Supports

Public Transport

Public Transport is important to ensure that other vital services can be provided. However we will be making some changes in response to social distancing requirements and the level of service demand.

Revised timetables for Iarnród Éireann will come into effect on Monday 30 March, while those for Dublin Bus, Go-Ahead Ireland and Bus Éireann, will come into effect Wednesday 1 April.

Under the revised timetables, services will run at approximately 80% of current levels.

While passenger numbers on public transport services are down, there are some services that continue to have heavier loading; this could potentially lead to issues with social distancing requirements. With some fleet and driver resources being freed up under the new schedules, additional vehicles can be provided for services where there is greater demand which will address those physical distancing concerns.

Courts Service

The Judiciary and the Courts Service are working together during this difficult period, to ensure their services to the public continue to be provided insofar as possible.

A statement has been issued by the President of the District Court confirming that domestic violence applications will continue to be given priority; and the provision of information in relation to other family law matters such as access, maintenance and guardianship. A link to this statement can be found [here](#) .

OGP Business support portal

At previous briefings, I have taken time to express government appreciation for individual community volunteers. I would like to take a chance now to thank the many businesses that have offered to support government measures and support our communities at this time.

An online portal is being created to provide a place where we can keep track of these offers. That portal should be available later today so if you wish to offer or donate goods or services your business provides that could be of assistance in Ireland's response to COVID-19, you can find more information on gov.ie/covidsupplies .

We may not need everything that is being offered. However we want to have a process to acknowledge those offers and ensure we reach the right people across the system. We also want to acknowledge all public contractors who are working closely and dynamically with us at this time. We will continue to pay all our suppliers, and prompt payment rules will still apply.

SUSI Grant

We would also like to advise that Student Universal Support Ireland will open for student grant applications for academic year 2020/21 as normal on 23 April 2020. We had hoped that would start earlier this year, however that won't be possible due to the public health emergency. So SUSI will be processing grants in the normal timeframe this year beginning on 23 April.

Supply Chains

The government's priority in the weeks to come is to ensure that supply chains remain operational and that essential retail can remain open so that people can purchase the essential supplies they need.

Minister Humphreys has engaged with the sector and has been assured that grocery retailers are implementing the public health guidelines on social distancing in their stores and are taking the necessary steps to maintain trading and keep going at this time.

We need the public to support this.

Government wants to take this opportunity to thank the countless number of people who are putting their shoulders to the wheel behind the scenes to keep our supermarkets and local shops stocked - the retail workers, distribution centres, suppliers, farmers, hauliers, logistics companies and many more.

A number of temporary contingency measures have been put in place to provide flexibility in Maritime transport and allow the sector to continue to work as normal at this time. These include an extension to seafarer documents and an extension to ship certificates.

This will ensure that shipping services continue and Irish ports are open for business. It is vitally important to ensure the supply of essential goods.

Citizens Abroad

Currently we are trying to help over 2,000 of our citizens in 86 countries who are seeking assistance to return to Ireland.

Following discussion between the Tánaiste and the Peruvian Foreign Ministry clearance has been given for a repatriation flight for Irish citizens looking to return home from Peru. Internal travel is heavily restricted in Peru and many of our citizens are located hundreds of miles away from the international airport. We are working 24 hours to get the necessary transport and permissions in place to move them. We will follow up with details on this situation when we have them.

Any citizens in Peru who have not already done so should contact the Embassy of Ireland in Santiago.

It is important to note that citizens who are not in Peru should not attempt to travel to Lima for the repatriation flight. As mentioned, strict quarantine measures are in place in Peru restricting internal travel.

Once again any citizens in Australia who have not already done so should contact the Irish Embassy in Canberra or Consulate General in Sydney.

Response and updates on concerns

Irish Prison Service

The volume of people entering and exiting our prisons on a daily basis means effective infection control and vigilance is absolutely essential.

Prisons are home or the place of work of over 7,000 people, and the Irish Prison Service has taken a number of necessary measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 including the restriction of visits to prisoners.

The Irish Prison Service has made every effort to continue to run normal family visits for as long as possible. However, in the best interest of the health and safety of prison staff, prisoners and their families, from tomorrow, normal physical visits will no longer be possible.

Physical visits will be replaced with electronic visits via internet platforms, that is videolink and video phones.

Electronic visits will negate the need for visitors to, for example, gather in the visitors' centres at each prison and are in line with the recommendations announced this week by the Taoiseach.

Caravan Parks

Following the statement around caravan parks at yesterday's briefing further questions have arisen around the use of caravans by their owners for self-isolating purposes. I want to just re-iterate that the aim of the restrictions is to limit tourist activity, not those who stay for long periods and feel the need to self-isolate. Judgement should be exercised by both users and operators of sites in this time of crisis which is constantly evolving.

For queries please contact Government Information Services by emailing: gisoffice@taoiseach.gov.ie