
Daily briefing on the government's response to COVID-19 - Saturday 28 March 2020

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

Good afternoon everyone.

I'd like to begin by thanking you for continuing to abide by [the latest public health measures](#).

Public health advice

Please continue to wash your hands regularly and thoroughly.

And continue to observe social distancing.

As the Taoiseach mentioned last night, we have moved into a more intensive phase of restrictive actions in our response to COVID-19 and must take the following actions to protect ourselves and each other.

The government has decided that everybody should stay at home until 12 April 2020, except for the following situations:

- to travel to and from work, or for purposes of work, only where the work is an essential health, social care or other essential service and cannot be done from home
 - to shop for essential food, beverage and household goods or collect a meal
 - to attend medical appointments and collect medicines and other health products
 - for vital family reasons, such as providing care to children, elderly or vulnerable people
 - to take brief individual physical exercise within 2 kilometres of your home.
 - always observe 2 metres physical distancing
 - you may take children from your own household outdoors for physical exercise
 - farming purposes, that is food production or care of animals
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Cocooning

One of the things that the Taoiseach talked about last night was cocooning.

The reason that the CMO has asked for cocooning of people over 70, or with a condition that makes them vulnerable is to keep you safe by reducing the number of people that you meet.

What you shouldn't do

- you shouldn't leave the house
 - you shouldn't have any visitors to your home unless they are visiting to give you vital care
 - you shouldn't attend any gatherings - even family get-togethers in your home or your family homes, weddings or religious services
 - you shouldn't go out for any reason
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What you should do

- avoid anyone who is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 – including anyone who usually cares for you from your family or a home care provider

- keep using the phone, internet and social media to stay in touch with your family and friends
- see what ways you can participate in activities remotely from your home
- phone the GP or any other service you need like getting your shopping and medicines delivered and have them left at your door
- make sure you keep your phones and other devices charged up and that you have phone credit

If you are worried about anything or need any food or medicine delivered – call your family or friends and any local provider and let them know what you need. There will be local arrangements to make sure anyone who needs help gets it.

If you are an older person and are living alone, contact the ALONE national helpline on 0818 222 024. Or contact your local Garda Station.

[You can view the full details on cocooning here.](#)

Parks, forests, natural amenities and other open public spaces

It is important that people take physical exercise and get out for fresh air during this time. These entities should therefore remain open for local use, if they are within 2 kilometres of your home. We expect those who staff these amenities to support social distancing, but we do expect you to follow the public health guidance.

We will keep this situation under review to ensure that public health guidelines are observed by those using these amenities at all times.

Local authority and community response

In light of the further COVID-19 measure announced by an Taoiseach, particularly around cocooning requirements for certain vulnerable members of the community, Minister Murphy, wrote to all local authority chief executives last night, requesting that they immediately

operationalise the Framework for Local Authority Community Support and put the helplines and support structures in place over the weekend.

Arising from this, the City and County Management Association met early this morning and the Local Authority Community Response Forum will meet in every local authority area to coordinate and ramp up work to help ensure all vulnerable members of our communities affected by these new arrangements are appropriately supported.

Chaired and coordinated by each local authority chief executive, the Forum will consist of the HSE, the council, county champions, An Post, Community Welfare Service, An Garda Síochána, other State organisations, charities and other stakeholders. It will lead the coordination of COVID-19 community supports and resilience in each area.

The forum will provide the following services:

- collection and delivery of food, essential household items, fuel, medication in line with guidance
- transport to community testing centres, clinical Assessment Hubs, GP and hospital appointments
- social isolation, supports, engagement
- meals and their delivery
- other medical/health needs

There will be a community support helpline/call centre operating from early morning to late evening, 7 days per week, in every local authority. It will be cross-referenced by the Alone National Helpline.

To support this:

- An Garda Síochána has taken necessary action to increase numbers of Gardai on duty during the crisis
- this weekend there will be approximately 2,000 to 2,500 Gardaí on duty on each shift

Essential workers

A lot of work and consideration has gone into categorising who are essential workers and we are cognisant of the fact that gaps or issues may arise but we will deal with them. As stated in previous guidance, all employees should work from home if at all possible.

The purpose of the [list of essential service providers under new public health guidelines](#) is to provide guidance to employers and employees as to what constitutes an essential service where workers cannot work from home and have no option but to travel to work.

All workers in [Essential Retail Outlets](#) are permitted to travel to work.

In addition, workers in the categories of essential services set out in the attached list are permitted to travel to work, subject to compliance with the guidance below.

If you carry out an activity that is necessary for the continued provision of an essential service by another organisation or you are part of an essential supply chain, you should continue to carry out that activity. To the maximum extent possible, that should be done remotely.

The government also recognises that many companies in Ireland are critical to global supply chains that are responding to the COVID-19 crisis, and many companies also perform critical global roles in other aspects of medicine, as well as security, cyber, cloud and data centre infrastructure. It is intended that these essential global roles are encompassed within this national guidance.

Employers should take the following steps:

- refer to this guidance to decide whether your organisation is providing an essential service; it is not necessary to seek official authorisation
- if you are providing an essential service, you should identify those employees (including sub-contractors and so on) who are essential to the provision of that service and notify them (this can be done by category of employee or by; it could include all employees of the organisation)
- if you are providing an essential service, latest public health guidance should be followed at all times

Employees should take the following steps

- if your employer notifies you that you are an essential employee, or that you belong to a category of essential employees, you are permitted to travel to and from work
- when travelling to and from work, you should at all times bring with you either a work identification or a letter from your employer indicating that you are an essential employee, as well as one other form of identification
- if you are self-employed, a farmer or agricultural worker, or a member of the clergy, you should carry one form of identification with you at all times
- if you are a volunteer who is working as part of the national community response, you are permitted to travel for that purpose (for example: if you are delivering food, supplies or medicine to a person who is cocooned or vulnerable)

The Local Government emergency response teams will co-ordinate that response at local level.

Business continuity and resilience

All organisations who provide essential services should have business continuity and resilience plans in place. This should take account of the possibility that key workers or key facilities may be impacted by COVID-19.

Non-essential services

If you are not engaged in the provision of essential services, then you are not permitted to travel to and from work until 12 April 2020.

There will be a grace period until 6pm on Monday 30 March for people who need to make necessary arrangements to wind down their activities in an orderly way. This should however be done in a way that minimises travel and personal interaction as much as possible.

In exceptional circumstances, it is accepted that some extra time will be needed for a wind down of activity, or, it may be necessary for a site to continue to operate at a reduced level of

activity (for example, in complex manufacturing processes or very large construction projects.)

Review

This guidance will be kept under ongoing review, and will be updated as required.

Panic buying

There were lots of images doing the rounds online today of people panic buying. The Taoiseach has reassured us that there is no need to stockpile or bulk buy. Food stores and takeaways will remain open in the emergency.

Public transport

Essential workers can continue to use public transport. If your only option to buy food or medical supplies, is to use public transport, then you should continue to do so.

Airports

We have had some queries about planes landing at airports. Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports remain open. They will do so to allow the repatriation of Irish citizens from abroad and to ensure our supply chains remain operational. There are a very small number of passenger flights in operation. They are all following public health guidelines. All people arriving into the country are asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

gov.ie

We are committed to providing accurate information to the public during this crisis.

Last night, Gov.ie experienced unprecedented traffic at 50,000 visitors per minute. This caused a temporary outage. We have now completed a major upgrade of technical capacity. This will ensure such outages can be avoided in the future and we thank you for your patience.