
Daily briefing on the government's response to COVID-19 - Thursday 9 April 2020

Published: 10 April 2020

From: [Department of the Taoiseach](#)

- [1. Introduction and Public Health Advice](#)
- [2. Wage Subsidy Scheme](#)
- [3. Queries in relation to Income Tax](#)
- [4. Expansion of Business Supports for SMEs](#)
- [5. VAT and Import Duties Relief for Goods Imported to Combat COVID-19](#)
- [6. Working securely from home](#)
- [7. Employees](#)
- [8. Community Measures and Supports](#)
- [9. Further Education and Training \(FET\) supports](#)

- [10. Guidance](#)
- [11. NALA](#)
- [12. Direct Provision](#)
- [13. Online Safety](#)
- [14. Workplace implementation of public health guidelines](#)
- [15. Weekend Cross-Border Travel](#)
- [16. Visits to Amenities](#)
- [17. 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. This coming few days the most important thing you can do is stay at home. It sounds simple,

we know its really hard and the majority of people are playing their part, making that sacrifice for everyone's benefit. We need everyone to make that effort. What we are doing, we are doing for our friends, our family, our neighbours and the most vulnerable people in our communities. It's a big ask but already its making a difference. We just need to stick at it and keep encouraging everyone to comply.

Our essential workers have to go to work, what everyone else has to do is to stay at home.

That is how we will save lives.

And just a reminder 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

Let's keep it going – We are the frontline.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

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

Over 40,300 employers are now registered with Revenue for the scheme.

Today (9 April), Revenue has generated further refunds under the scheme worth €34 million.

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

The cumulative value of payments made under the scheme is €155 million.

Queries in relation to Income Tax

Queries have been raised regarding how receipt of the Temporary Wage Subsidy scheme will be managed with income tax assessment. As normal, Revenue will carry out an end of year review for all employees (not just those receiving the scheme) after the end of the tax year. This 'Preliminary End of Year Statement' will show if the person has paid the correct amount of tax and Universal Social Charge for the year. If an individual has any additional tax credits to claim, for example health expenses, they can then do so by submitting an Income Tax Return.

The amount of income tax that an individual would have to pay depends on the amount of the income that they earn and on their personal circumstances.

It's not possible to give general advice but guidance on how to calculate your income tax can be found on Revenue's website.

Expansion of Business Supports for SMEs

The government want to thank all the business owners and workers right across the country for the part they are playing, and the sacrifices they are making, to help us all through this unprecedented public health emergency. The government has already announced a range of supports including the Wage Subsidy Scheme, COVID-19 Unemployment Payment and payment deferment on rates.

Yesterday, a major expansion of the Business Supports was announced, with a particular focus on Small and Medium Enterprises.

The package includes a range of measures, from enhanced liquidity supports, extension of supports for online trading, sustaining enterprise supports to training and mentoring services.

The 31 Local Enterprise Offices have seen a very significant increase in the volume of small business engagement in recent weeks, and an additional €30 million for smaller enterprises comprising additional funding for MicroFinance Ireland and Trading Online Grants is also available. Live training webinars have been rolled out through all Local Enterprise Offices,

packed with valuable information and tips for small and medium enterprises and the uptake is extremely high.

The full range of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and Údarás na Gaeltachta grant and advisory supports continue to be available to eligible firms to help with strategies to access finance, commence or increase online trading activity, reconfigure business models, cut costs, innovate, diversify markets and supply chains and improve competitiveness.

For more information on these supports please go to gov.ie.

VAT and Import Duties Relief for Goods Imported to Combat COVID-19

Yesterday it was agreed that trading of goods to combat COVID-19 which are imported from outside the EU will be free of import duty and Value Added Tax (VAT). This will offer significant savings to the HSE and other healthcare organisations such as nursing homes, and is designed to be of assistance to them in the efforts they are making in the care, support and treatment of people at risk of COVID-19.

Increased Mobile Phone and Broadband Capacity As a result of measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a very sharp increase in the use of mobile networks as people rely more heavily on their operators to communicate, use government services and stay connected with family, friends and work. Mobile networks have coped well with the extra usage, but they currently have less headroom to accommodate further increases or potential spikes in demand. The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment working with the Commission for Communications Regulation have today signed regulations which will provide mobile network operators flexibility to create extra capacity for mobile phone and broadband services.

Working securely from home

The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment is today publishing guidance from the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), on working from home securely.

The recent COVID-19 situation has suddenly presented IT personnel and indeed all users with a set of cyber security challenges that, whilst not unique, are being experienced on a significantly larger scale than ever before.

The new guidance sets out how people working from home as part of the fight against COVID-19 can protect themselves from cyber-attacks while staying connected.

The advice explains how to secure your home office from cyber-related threats, including guidance on:

- how to avoid email phishing (including vishing) and how to protect your business email
- using your home Wi-Fi securely
- maintaining strong password practices
- using work devices at home
- using personal devices for work purposes
- securing virtual/remote meetings

The National Cybersecurity Centre today urged users to be vigilant, check sources, details and context and report suspicious activity to info@ncsc.gov.ie your bank or local Garda Station immediately.

The full guidance and important advice from the NCSC for staying safe online plus tips from WebWise for parents, children and young people, is available at [BeSafeOnline.gov.ie](https://www.be-safe.gov.ie).

In addition, a reminder that the Health and Safety Authority have produced a Frequently Asked Questions document for Employers and Employees in relation to Home-Working on a temporary basis. See [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie) for a link.

Employees

While the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection Pandemic Unemployment Payment Scheme currently provides income support to 507,000 recipients, a number of these are closing their claim, primarily because their employer is availing of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, which is administered by the Revenue Commissioners.

The number of people who have closed their Pandemic Unemployment Payment has now increased to over 33,000. Approximately 80% of these claims were closed because the recipient is now back in work. 5% said that they were claiming another Social Welfare payment while 15% did not give a specific reason when closing their claim.

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 1,335 calls and made 699 follow-up calls.

They provided:

- 438 collection and deliveries of items like groceries, fuel or medicines
- 144 actions relating to social outreach services, talking to people who need someone to talk to
- over 45 relating to meals
- 65 relating to health request
- 550 relating to other requests

The Fora helplines are partnering with ALONE, the national charity for older people.

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.

We encourage anyone who needs help or wants to volunteer to give help to contact their local forum.

And if you know someone who needs help please don't hesitate to call the ALONE helpline or the local helpline number and someone will direct your call.

Further Education and Training (FET) supports

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are working hard to make sure that there is continuous engagement with their learners, including learners who are taking part in adult literacy and English language programmes. ETB staff are using all of the technology that is available to them to ensure that learners can continue their studies. Adult literacy and English language exercises and lessons are being provided through a range of platforms, including Kahoot, YouTube, Facebook and Zoom. ETB are keeping in contact with learners who do not have access to broadband or ICT equipment by phone. Learning packs are also delivered to adult literacy and English language students each week, containing lesson material and general information that will support the individual's learning.

Guidance

The 16 ETBs also provide guidance and information to further education and training learners and prospective learners.

In recent weeks, adult guidance counsellors have mainly been delivering their services online, and continue to deliver a professional service particularly to those who may be experiencing anxiety, uncertainty, bereavement, poverty, loneliness or a sense of lack of purpose.

Information on adult guidance services can be found on the website of your local Education and Training board.

NALA

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is currently providing tutor phone support and online learning to all learners currently enrolled in their classes.

In addition, it is providing supports in the following areas:

- help to anyone with literacy, numeracy or digital skills needs in understanding COVID-19 written and online information

- help to parents who want to support their children's learning through their website www.HelpMyKidLearn.ie
- help with plain English, financial literacy and health literacy. NALA is working with the HSE, government departments and government agencies, to ensure that all communications with the public are in plain English and are expressed through simple messages, visuals and videos

For information on supports provided by NALA visit their [website](#) or contact NALA on Freephone 1800 20 20 65 where tutors are available to help or, alternatively, Freetext LEARN to 50050 and NALA will return the call.

Direct Provision

Further measures have been announced to protect and support Direct Provision residents during the COVID-19 crisis.

These include:

- four hotels now contracted to provide dedicated self-isolation rooms in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Dundalk
- a partnership arrangement with HSE and SafetyNet for public health advice - including dedicated medical support via phone line for centre staff
- a further 200 beds have now been added on top of the 650 beds recently added to support social distancing and cocooning measures - 650 Direct Provision residents have been relocated in response to Public Health Guidance

To date this year, over 1,550 beds have been procured by the Department of Justice and Equality

Online Safety

I spoke earlier about cyber security particularly for those who are working or operating businesses from home.

New online platforms and resources have been vital in allowing us to stay connected with each other in these difficult times. The increasing number of online ways to communicate, to socialise, to shop, to stay up to date, and to engage with events has been a great help to all of us as we play our part in the fight against COVID-19 by staying at home. However, we want to remind everyone that it's really important to maintain our online safety against the background of the pandemic.

We recommend that anyone with concerns visit [BeSafeOnline](#), Ireland's official online safety hub, on gov.ie. It provides access to a wide range of Online Safety resources. If you have a question on any issue, you should get advice there. For example, if you're not familiar with popular apps such as Zoom or TikTok and you want to make sure they're safe for you or your children to use. Or if you want to know how to keep your data safe, look after your mental health or protect against online fraud, a wealth of information on these issues and more is available to you through [BeSafeOnline](#) on gov.ie.

Workplace implementation of public health guidelines

We have had a number of queries around what an employee should do if they have concerns about the implementation of public health guidelines in the work place. Where you have a concern, you can get in touch with the Health and Safety Authority. The HSA is tracking the nature and number of complaints received to determine if they are seeing public health issues arising in particular companies or sectors and will advise the relevant parties as necessary.

Weekend Cross-Border Travel

There is excellent ongoing cooperation between An Garda Síochána and their colleagues in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Points of contact have been established to monitor cross-border travel and to ensure that restrictions in this jurisdiction are adhered to. Key locations of concern have been identified and the guards will follow their usual approach to engage, educate, encourage and enforce as a last resort.

Visits to Amenities

I am also reminding people that you should not travel outside 2 kilometres for your physical exercise. We know that a great many people are complying. Coillte have told us that they have an 80% fall in visits to their forests and they want to thank you for that. Remember, if an amenity is not within your 2 kilometres zone, you shouldn't visit. The car parks won't be open. Where public health measures are not being complied with, it may result in the facility being closed for everyone, including those who do live within the 2 kilometres zone.

Finally

The Easter Bunny question....

While the World Health Organization has not yet issued any guidelines, we always like to be cognisant of international best practice in these matters. The general view is that there are many good reasons why the Easter Bunny may not be able to visit households this year. So, whether the Easter Bunny arrives or not, celebrate the day, stay at home and thank you for all your efforts.