
Daily briefing on the government's response to COVID-19 - Wednesday 15 April 2020

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- [1. Introduction and up-to-date Public Health Guidance](#)
- [2. Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme](#)
- [3. Exchequer Funded Capital Projects under Project Ireland 2040](#)
- [4. COVID-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit Payment](#)
- [5. Supply Chain Continuity](#)
- [6. Community Call Fora](#)
- [7. Telecommunications Consumer Charter](#)

- [8. Webwise](#)
- [9. Domestic Violence](#)
- [10. Updated response on school transport refunds](#)
- [11. Parks and Nature Reserves](#)
- [12. National Library announces COVID-19 web archiving](#)
- [13. Finally](#)

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Introduction and up-to-date Public Health Guidance

We are now well into our third week of restrictions. It's hard but we have to remain focused on following public health guidelines.

There are indications that what we are doing is working and we need to persevere. While we need to stay apart, we also need to look after our wellbeing and the wellbeing of our loved ones.

Remember to take the time to connect with friends, family and neighbours remotely. It is normal to feel anxiety and additional stress during these difficult times but we can still reach out to each other and support each other.

Remember if you need assistance, it's there for you. You can call ALONE on 0818 222 0245 or your local Community Call number.

In addition to looking after ourselves and each other, everyone should remember the most effective personal actions we can take to help slow the spread of COVID-19:

- wash your hands regularly and thoroughly
- use good cough and sneeze etiquette
- observe social distancing measures
- stay at home

Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme

Take-up of the [Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme](#) introduced by Government is continuing to grow.

Over 43,400 employers are now registered with Revenue for the scheme.

Later this morning, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure, Paschal Donohoe T.D. will provide a further update on the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme.

Exchequer Funded Capital Projects under Project Ireland 2040

It is obvious that the restrictions currently in place in the interest of public safety are impacting many areas of the economy, including the construction sector.

A strong and healthy construction sector is crucial to the delivery of Project Ireland 2040 and to our overall economic wellbeing.

As such, yesterday, a suite of measures was announced to safeguard the integrity of the capital spending programme and to provide for a timely restart to construction, when circumstances allow.

These measures include:

- continuation of the planning and preparation of projects in the Project Ireland 2040 pipeline, while extending the tender deadlines and deferring the award of contracts
- ensuring that pre-construction design work continues so that projects are ready to go to tender once the public health measures are relaxed
- extending payments to contractors on public works contracts to cover certain costs associated with site closures

Public investment will continue to play an important role as the economy recovers and these measures will allow for the construction on these projects to start up quickly and be accelerated if needed as soon as possible when the time comes.

COVID-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit Payment

There are 27,300 people who are medically certified to meet the conditions for receipt of the [COVID-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit payment](#), which is €350 per week.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has received medical certificates for these people via their GP.

However, in order to process the payment, it is also necessary for the individual concerned to submit an application form.

Only 17,000 of these people have, as yet submitted the application form required and as a result, approximately 10,000 cases cannot be processed to conclusion.

If you are unsure about whether you submitted an application form, please contact the Illness Benefit Contact Centre at 01-7043300 or at 1890-928400. Please have your PPS Number to hand when you make contact so that the status of your application can be determined.

Supply Chain Continuity

To ensure continuity of the delivery and distribution of goods, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport have agreed to further extend the relaxation of some EU driving and resting time rules for Heavy Goods Vehicle operators and drivers.

This extension will apply to all HGV operators and HGV drivers who are subject to the EU driver's hours and tachograph rules and who are engaged in the carriage of all goods (including oil supplies and so on).

This will apply from 17 April to 31 May 2020 and will continue to be reviewed by the RSA during this time.

Community Call Fora

The Community Call Fora, run by the local authorities, continue to provide help and support to those in need in communities around the country. Yesterday, they received 1,271 calls nationally, on issues such as the collection and delivery of items like groceries; people needing someone to talk to; medical or health services; and the delivery of meals. They made 567 follow-up calls to people who have contacted them.

Nationally, since 31 March, the Community Call Fora have received 12,607 calls and have made 6,562 follow-up calls.

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

A dedicated Community Call Forum helpline is operational in every local authority area. You can find your local helpline number [here](#).

The Fora helplines are partnering with [ALONE](#). If someone needs information, reassurance, or just to talk they can call ALONE's national phone line, as outlined above. They can also contact ALONE if they are experiencing difficulties with physical and mental health, finance, loneliness and other challenges.

Telecommunications Consumer Charter

Today it's being announced that all major internet providers have signed up to a new Charter which will help people stay in touch and work from home during COVID-19.

- people who currently have limitations in terms of usage and access will have the opportunity to make affordable arrangements to upgrade their packages to higher or unlimited rates
- every effort will be made to ensure that people are not restricted in their internet usage and measures will be taken to manage traffic and ensure networks don't become congested
- access to healthcare and educational resource websites identified by the government will be zero-rated for all customers where technically feasible. Data consumed in accessing a zero-rated website is completely free and so does not count for billing purposes or in the calculation of data usage with reference to a consumer's data allowance
- service providers will engage with any customer that contacts them who is in financial difficulty as a result of COVID-19 and has difficulty paying their bills to agree the best way of keeping them connected to voice and data

We know people are relying on all kinds of online services now more than ever and we want to ensure they can stay connected with family, friends and colleagues.

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Webwise

While schools are closed and restrictions are in place, it's likely that online activity will have increased in the home for both learning and entertainment purposes. For parents and guardians, it's important to remember that it's never too late to have a conversation with your child about safe online communication.

You can get practical advice on how young people can protect themselves online from [Webwise](#) through the [BeSafeOnline](#) hub.

Domestic Violence

The Department of Justice and Equality would like to advise that a TV, radio and social media campaign to call attention to the danger of domestic abuse begins today.

This is a collaborative campaign between Government and frontline services. The campaign aims to reassure victims that services are [‘still here’](#) even in the midst of the COVID-19 emergency.

Updated response on school transport refunds

We are aware that queries have been raised in relation to school transport refunds in light of further extensions to school closures. This situation is being reviewed and decisions will be made once we know the full impact in terms of closures in the current school year.

With regard to school bus contractors operating on the School Transport Scheme, they were paid their normal rates following the initial announcement that schools would be closed in light of the exceptional circumstances.

When closures were extended through the Easter holidays they were paid 50% for the week leading up to the beginning of the holidays which is in line with normal unexpected closures.

The Easter holiday period would have extended to 17 April and decisions around further arrangements will be subject to review at that stage.

Parks and Nature Reserves

Efforts have been made to ensure that insofar as possible national parks and nature reserves remain open and accessible to local residents to allow them to exercise and get fresh air. In general, most people are doing this in compliance with the vital public health guidance around social distancing and within the stipulated 2 kilometres.

In order to ensure that people continue to use these parks safely and in compliance with public health guidelines there are limits to what activities are allowed at this time.

For that reason, we want to be clear that all access to the Lakes of Killarney, be it for boating, kayaking or fishing, is currently restricted. We know these are valuable pastimes but we need to consider the broader impact of these activities at this time and ensure that we do not place any additional strain on the emergency services at this time of crisis.

National Library announces COVID-19 web archiving

The National Library of Ireland is asking members of the public to nominate websites / digital resources they think should be retained in the National Library's archive as a record of this time in Irish life. Websites that will be archived include those that capture the major efforts across Government, the health sector, and Irish society to combat the pandemic. They are inviting all those who would like to nominate a website to fill in a short form, which can be found on their website [here](#). They can be then emailed to them at webarchives@nli.ie

Finally

Thank you again for all you are doing.

It is making a difference.