

## What is happening?

The Government is announcing additional measures to protect citizens by delaying the spread of COVID-19.

The general public is asked to follow this advice and keep informed of this ongoing outbreak.

We are actively working to delay the spread of this virus, so that our health system will be able to respond effectively.

## What is social distancing?

Social distancing aims, through a variety of means, to decrease or interrupt the spread of COVID-19. It does this by minimising contact between potentially infected individuals and healthy individuals.

Social distancing is keeping a 2m (6ft) space between you and other people. You should not shake hands or make close contact where possible.

## What are these measures?

It is important to reduce the risk of further spread of the infection.

- 1) **Self-isolate:** People are now being asked to stay at home if they have 'flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, etc) regardless of travel or contact history.
- 2) **Social Interactions:** Reduce interactions with people outside the workplace by at least 75%.

All citizens are required to:

- avoid crowded places;
- increase interpersonal distance (ideally separation of at least 2 metres, not shaking hands, avoiding communal sleeping areas);
- when in crowded settings, people should practice personal protective measures as they usually do (e.g., frequent hand hygiene, avoid touching eyes/nose/mouth).

- 3) **Vulnerable Groups**

Protective self-separation is recommended for a person who is at high-risk of severe illness from COVID-19, when the virus is circulating in their community.

These groups include:

- All people aged 75 years and over;
- People (adults and children) with long-term medical conditions including people with cardiac and respiratory conditions;
- People whose immune system is impaired due to disease or treatment including cancer patients;
- Patients with any condition that can compromise respiratory function;
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-stay settings (including disability, mental health and older persons services);

- All over 50-year olds within the specialist disability health services;
- All people in the specialist disability health services with an underlying health condition.

All day services and community day hospitals (including disability, mental health and older persons services) are asked to enhance their social distancing measures.

#### 4) **Mass Gatherings**

There should be no mass gatherings:

- Involving more than 100 people if located indoors
- Involving more than 500 people if located outdoors

Museums, galleries and tourism sites will close.

Social distancing and good hygiene should be exercised in all instances.

Respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 spread quickly in crowded spaces. Mass gatherings can amplify the spread of these diseases.

Infections can also be transmitted travelling to and from an event, and in participants' home communities upon return. These recommendations are in line with those now taken by most other EU countries.

Examples of mass gatherings may include conferences, sporting events, religious events, national and international events.

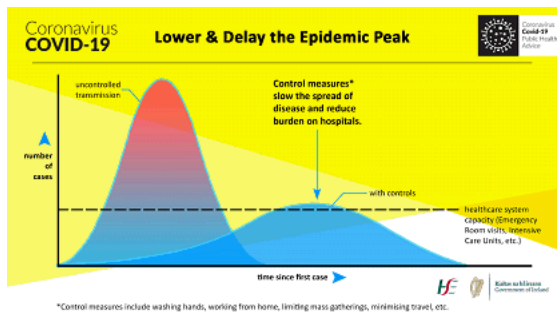
#### 5) **Closure of Schools, Creches, Childcare Facilities and Higher Education Institutions**

The following institutions will close to students;

- educational institutions including creches/ kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and
- higher educational institutions, including universities, research institutes etc.

#### **What does delay mean?**

We know that COVID19 (Coronavirus) is contagious and many people will catch it. Our delay strategy is planned to slow down the spread of the virus. This means that for example, if 1,000 people are going to catch the virus, the delay initiatives should result in 200 people per week catching the virus over five weeks, rather than 500 people per week catching the virus over 2 weeks. That way we will be able to reduce the burden on our GPs and hospitals.



## Will delay measures eliminate COVID19 (Coronavirus)?

It is estimated that all these social distancing measures will significantly reduce the demand for hospital capacity during the peak of the epidemic. This may also reduce the total number of cases and deaths.

Experience from China indicates that the early decisive rapid coordinated and comprehensive implementation of social distancing measures are likely to be more effective in slowing the spread of the virus.

## Are you banning flights?

WHO is not recommending that flights be banned at this point.

We are increasing HSE's Environmental Health presence in the airports. Arrivals will be made aware of our public health advice, asking them to practice social distancing and self-isolation if necessary.

## Do I shut down my business?

Employers/employees should prepare to work from home, where possible.

It is recommended that there be a reduction of workplace contacts by 25%, implementation of remote working practices/teleconferencing where possible and not to travel for meetings. Work times and break times should be staggered where possible.

Employers will be asked to increase awareness about and communication to staff about COVID-19 and to introduce policies to reduce social contact, such as:

- flexible hours;
- staggering start times and break times;
- teleworking arrangements;
- using email and teleconferencing;
- reduce face-to-face meetings and gatherings.

Droplets generated by coughs and sneezes are a major source of COVID-19 transmission. Social distancing in workplaces can decrease the risk of person-to-person transmission by reducing droplet transmission that occurs within 2 metres.

If an employee develops 'flu-like symptoms they should immediately be separated from others, instructed on respiratory etiquette and sent home (not using public transport, if possible).

Advice from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is available [here](#).

### **Are visitors banned from hospitals, nursing homes and long stay settings from today?**

Restricted visiting is operating in hospitals and nursing homes. Limited social contact within nursing homes, hospitals and long stay settings is required.

Restricted visiting will operate for all residential services (including disability, mental health and older persons services).

### **Can you describe the symptoms of COVID-19 that require people to stay at home?**

The most common symptoms of the virus are:

- [fever \(high temperature\)](#)
- [a cough](#) - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry
- shortness of breath
- breathing difficulties

### **Should those with these symptoms contact their GP? Will those with these symptoms be tested for COVID-19?**

If you are experiencing these symptoms and are concerned you have been in contact with a person infected with COVID-19, self-isolate and contact your GP by phone.

Your GP or public health doctor will assess you and decide if a test for COVID-19 is necessary.

### **Will the supply of food be affected?**

Businesses are working to ensure that there will be no interruption to the supply chain.

Supermarkets and pharmacies are remaining open with good social distancing

### **How long will my school be closed?**

Schools will be closed until the 29<sup>th</sup> March and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

**Can I take public transport as normal?**

Yes, but try to travel off peak and practice social distancing. If you are experiencing symptoms, do not use public transport. Self isolate and call your GP.

**Will you be stopping trains and buses?**

No. Public transport will continue but the public is asked to follow guidelines on social distancing.

**Should I wear a mask?**

No. There is no evidence to show that masks protect healthy people from COVID-19. Masks are required for healthcare workers in clinical settings.

**Should children keep away from grandparents even if neither of them are sick?**

Social distancing should be practiced particularly with vulnerable groups.