

From: HQ

Date: Thursday 12 March 2020 at 15:51

Subject: VetALERT 10c - COVID 19 Update - Closure of Schools - Meetings Limited by Attendance Numbers - HR / Employee and Business Supports

Dear Veterinary Ireland Member,

Veterinary Ireland continues to advise all members, employers and employees, **to act prudently, and to monitor official Irish Government advice (HSE / GOV.IE), as well as updates from the World Health Organisation (WHO) in relation to COVID-19 (Coronavirus)**, the following **updates** may be useful to members in their practice and personal lives, in order to assist in preventing the further spread of COVID-19.

For further information, including useful **COVID-19 posters** for **COVID-19 Facts, Hand Hygiene** and **Respiratory Hygiene (Cover-Up)**, please refer to the **Essential Websites at the foot of this email.**

A. Dept Health - Updated Website on Measures in Response to COVID 19

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ea1c30-updated-measures-in-response-to-covid-19-coronavirus/>

The Department of Health has updated its Measures in Response to COVID-19 Document (**PDF Copy attached**).

The Measures now include:

- 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 this 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 (see B. following)

B. Closure of Schools, Colleges and Child-Care Facilities

<https://www.gov.ie/en/speech/5a280b-statement-by-an-taoiseach-on-measures-to-tackle-covid-19-washington/>

Following a public statement by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar on 12th March 2020, the following measures will come into effect from **6pm Thursday 12th March 2020 until Sunday 29 March 2020:**

- **schools, colleges and childcare facilities will close from 6pm 12th March 2020 - where possible, teaching will be done online or remotely**
- **indoor mass gatherings of 100 people or more and outdoor mass gatherings of more than 500 people are to be cancelled**
- **all State-run cultural institutions will close**
- **Where it is possible to work remotely people should do so.**
- **In order to reduce unnecessary face to face interaction in the workplace, working time should be staggered and meetings done remotely, or by phone,**
- **Public transport will continue, and shops will continue to remain open.**

C. Small Firms Association (SFA) - Advice for Businesses Impacted by COVID-19

The SFA has forwarded to Veterinary Ireland Information which may be pertinent to those Veterinary Practices impacted by COVID-19

SFA Advice - Closures - Employee / HR Considerations

While COVID-19 remains in Ireland, Irish businesses, including Veterinary Practices, may face a situation where normal working is no longer possible and the employer is faced with the problem of reducing working hours.

*Rather than make employees redundant, an employer has the option of introducing **lay-off** or **short-time working** in such situations.*

*In order for the employer to implement either lay-off or short-time working, there must be a specific clause included in the employee's written contract of employment. If such a clause is not included in the contract, an employer must get consent from the employee to be placed on either short-time or lay-off working arrangements, as this is then a change to the employees terms and conditions of employment. Employers need to note that **lay-off** or **short-time working** is only a temporary solution, and if either are undertaken for a period of time, then the employee may claim redundancy from the employer. Employees of businesses that need to reduce hours or days worked can avail of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection **Short Term Work Support** - <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/c20e1b-short-time-work-support/>*

Any Veterinary Ireland Member considering undertaking Lay-Off or Short-Time working arrangements are advised to contact Veterinary Ireland Headquarters (HQ@vetireland.ie / 01-457-7976) for further information.

SFA Advice - Staff Absences in relation to COVID-19

Employees who have been in contact with somebody who has COVID-19, or employees who have travelled to areas affected by the virus should follow the [Health protection Surveillance Centre](#) guidance before attending work and should contact the [HSE](#) or their local GP through telephone.

If an employee is absent due to a fear of contracting the virus an employer must assess the issues, consider the risks, and put relevant controls in place. An employer must consider the risks and consider whether the employee is a vulnerable employee. The employer should be reasonable in situations such as “my child’s school has closed due to possible outbreak”, “my ill grandmother lives with me and is high risk”, “I am in self-isolation after travelling to an affected area”.

Where a low risk employee refuses to attend work, and they have not been in an affected area nor have they been in contact with somebody who has the virus, the employer can request them to attend work. An employee who continues to be absent from work in these circumstances may be subject to disciplinary action for unauthorised absence.

If an employee’s child’s school is closed and the employee is not entitled to sick pay according to their contract, then it is advisable that the employer is reasonable and proportionate. They should discuss other options such as use their annual leave entitlement or be paid and work back the time at a later stage. If the employer shows flexibility and fairness it results in good employee relations.

Some employees may be afraid of catching coronavirus and decide not to go to work. An employer should listen to any concerns staff may have and try to resolve them through providing updated information and recommendations to minimise the risk. However, if an employee continues to refuse to go to work, it could result in disciplinary action.

D. Dept Employment Affairs & Social Protection (DEASP) - Advice on COVID-19 (PDFs)

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/66d22e-covid-19-deasp-information-for-employers-and-employees-pdf/>

The DEASP has a number of **PDFs** available in relation to employment and COVID-19.

These include:

- COVID-19 DEASP Information for Employers and Employees (PDF)
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/66d22e-covid-19-deasp-information-for-employers-and-employees-pdf/>
- Information on Illness Benefit under COVID-19
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/66d22e-covid-19-deasp-information-for-employers-and-employees-pdf/>
- COVID-19 quick guide
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/66d22e-covid-19-deasp-information-for-employers-and-employees-pdf/>

E. Dept Employment Affairs & Social Protection (DEASP) - Income Support Schemes

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-employment-affairs-and-social-protection/>

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection are introducing measures to provide income support to people affected by COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

3 major changes have been announced:

- the current 6-day waiting period for **Illness Benefit** will not apply to anyone who has COVID-19 (Coronavirus) or is in medically-required self-isolation.
- the personal rate of **Illness Benefit** will increase from €203 per week to €305 per week for a maximum of 2 weeks medically-required self-isolation or for the full duration of absence from work following a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 (Coronavirus).
- the normal social insurance requirements for **Illness Benefit** will be changed or the means test for **Supplementary Welfare Allowance** will be removed.

Illness Benefit:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/ddf6e3-illness-benefit/>

Supplementary Welfare Allowance:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/36e514-supplementary-welfare-allowance/>

F. Dept of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) - Supports for Businesses Impacted by COVID-19

<https://dbei.gov.ie/Djei/en/News-And-Events/Department-News/2020/March/10032020.html>

The Minister of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI), Heather Humphreys TD, has announced details on the package of supports put in place for businesses impacted by COVID-19.

The **range of supports** include:

- A €200m **Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI)** Working Capital scheme for eligible businesses impacted by COVID-19. Loans of up to €1.5m will be available at reduced rates, with up to the first €500,000 unsecured. Applications can be made through the [SBCI website](#). (NB: To be eligible for the SBCI COVID-19 Working Capital Scheme, businesses must satisfy one of the COVID-19 criteria and one of the innovation criteria set out for the scheme. There is a broad suite of innovation criteria and this offers a wide range of opportunity for businesses to engage in the scheme. Guidelines will be provided on the SBCI website to help businesses determine if they are eligible for the scheme.)
- A **€200m Package for Enterprise Supports** including a Rescue and Restructuring Scheme available through **Enterprise Ireland** (<https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/>) for vulnerable but viable firms that need to restructure or transform their business.
- Enterprise Ireland also will soon be providing an online portal of advice and business continuity tools and webinars for businesses, and with the Local Enterprise Offices will also be activating advisory clinics and mentoring support for impacted firms.
- The maximum loan available from **MicroFinance Ireland** will be increased from €25,000 to **€50,000** as an immediate measure to specifically deal with exceptional circumstances that micro-enterprises – (sole traders and firms with up to 9 employees) - are facing. Applications can be made through the [MFI website](#) or through your **Local Enterprise Office (LEO)** (<https://www.localenterprise.ie/Find-Your-Local-Enterprise-Office/>).
- The **Credit Guarantee Scheme** will be available to COVID-19 impacted firms through the Pillar Banks. Loans of up to €1m will be available at terms of up to 7 years.

In addition, the following supports for firms experiencing trading difficulties and short-term shocks are soon to be put in place:

- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation will provide a joint First Responder support service through the Intreo Offices and development agencies, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland in each region to provide tailored supports for impacted firms, with objective of avoiding mass lay-offs and buying time for firms to work through the short-term disruptions.
- Firms that need to reduce hours or days worked can avail of the **Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection Short**

Term Work Support by contacting their local **Intreo Office**, see gov.ie/en/service/c20e1b-short-time-work-support.

- The full range of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Enterprise Office and Udarás na Gaeltachta grant supports will be available to firms to help with strategies to innovate, diversify markets and supply chains and to improve competitiveness.

G. Dept of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) - Continuity Advice for Business during COVID-19 outbreak:

<https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Business-Continuity-Planning-A-checklist-of-Preparatory-Actions-in-Responding-to-the-COVID-19-Outbreak.html>

The DBEI through its development agencies will continue to provide information support to business on Continuity Planning Checklist, which includes a **practical checklist** as well as links to relevant COVID-19 advice developed in conjunction with the HSE and Department of Health.

I am continuing to work on this topic and will endeavour to pass on any further information to Veterinary Ireland Members, as it becomes available to Veterinary Ireland Headquarters.

Take care and God bless

Peter Bishton
Deputy Chief Executive

ESSENTIAL COVID 19 WEBSITES

Dept Health - Updated Website on Measures in Response to COVID 19

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ea1c30-updated-measures-in-response-to-covid-19-coronavirus/>

HSE - COVID-19 Updates:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/>

HSE - COVID-19 Advice:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html>

Irish Government advice on COVID-19:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/472f64-covid-19-coronavirus-guidance-and-advice/>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ea1c30-updated-measures-in-response-to-covid-19-coronavirus/>

WHO general advice on COVID-19:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

WHO advice to the public on COVID-19:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

HSE - COVID-19 Posters:

[COVID-19 poster \(PDF, 760KB, 1 page\)](#)

[Hand hygiene poster \(PDF, 129KB, 1 page\)](#)

[Respiratory Hygiene Poster \(PDF, 1 Page\)](#)

Veterinary Council of Ireland Advice on COVID-19 (NEW 11.3.20)

<https://www.vci.ie/Utility/News/2020/VCI-Guidance-Note-for-registrants-on-Corona-Virus>

WSAVA (Updated 7.3.20)

<https://wsava.org/news/highlighted-news/the-new-coronavirus-and-companion-animals-advice-for-wsava-members/>

HSE's Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC):

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/>

HSE/HPSC Posters:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/posters/>

HPSC - Videos for GP Practices (NEW)

While designed for **GP practices**, these videos may have some application for Vet practices in general application.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/primarycareguidance/>

HSE/HPSC Advice for Workers Dealing with the General Public:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/employersguidance/Guidance%20on%20COVID%2019%20for%20workers%20dealing%20with%20the%200general%20public%20v2.pdf>

ICTU Campaign: Workers Be Aware – Wash Your Hands with Care

WHO video on handwashing.

<https://youtu.be/3PmVJQUcm4E>

Irish Times article of 10.3.20 on handwashing.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/coronavirus-pitfalls-of-poor-hand-washing-revealed-by-uv-light-1.4197876>

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)

[ECDC - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Data Protection Commission - Data Protection and COVID-19 (NEW)

<https://www.dataprotection.ie/en/news-media/blogs/data-protection-and-covid-19>

Closure of Schools, Colleges and Child-Care Facilities

<https://www.gov.ie/en/speech/5a280b-statement-by-an-taoiseach-on-measures-to-tackle-covid-19-washington/>

Dept of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) - Short Term Work Support (via local Intreo Office)

gov.ie/en/service/c20e1b-short-time-work-support.

Dept Employment Affairs & Social Protection (DEASP) - Income Support Schemes

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-employment-affairs-and-social-protection/>

Illness Benefit:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/ddf6e3-illness-benefit/>

Supplementary Welfare Allowance:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/36e514-supplementary-welfare-allowance/>

Dept of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) - Continuity Advice for Business during COVID-19 outbreak:

<https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Business-Continuity-Planning-A-checklist-of-Preparatory-Actions-in-Responding-to-the-COVID-19-Outbreak.html>

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<https://dbe.gov.ie/Djei/en/News-And-Events/Department-News/2020/March/10032020.html>

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) Working Capital scheme

<https://sbci.gov.ie/>

Enterprise Ireland

<https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/>

MicroFinance Ireland

<https://microfinanceireland.ie/>

Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

<https://www.localenterprise.ie/Find-Your-Local-Enterprise-Office/>