

## **21 March 2020: Further information on social isolation, childcare and other matters:**

### **Are we on complete lockdown?**

Absolutely not. What we are asking people and businesses to do is take sensible measures in the public interest that will delay the spread of the virus.

Our ports and airports are open and people who need to go to their place of work are going. The country and our public services will keep running.

This is disruptive and hard for people to manage but it's important that we do this in solidarity to protect our families, friends and neighbours who need it.

### **Childcare, playdates etc:**

Children may play a significant role in spreading this virus.

Even if all are deemed healthy, social distancing should be practiced. This is especially the case in relation to vulnerable groups like older people (grandparents).

It is strongly recommended that those who are asked to mind children during this time should NOT be older than age 75, or have a chronic disease, or be in an immunosuppressed state. Sick children should not visit anyone

A childminder can come to your home, if appropriate social distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette measures are maintained between all concerned and the childminder is not a member of a vulnerable group.

Parents should try and avoid arranging play dates for groups of young children, but you can engage in outdoor activities such as playing football in the open in small groups of 3 or 4 while maintaining social distancing of 2 metres.

### **Why advise individuals to self-isolate for 14 days if they have 'flu-like symptoms?**

During an outbreak, it is important to reduce the risk of further spread of the infection. 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.

### **What is the advice in relation to reducing interactions with contacts outside the workplace?**

This recommendation entails asking all people with no symptoms to voluntarily

- avoid crowded places;
- increasing interpersonal distancing (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);
- avoid places where rapid self-isolation is not possible upon onset of symptoms.

### **What is the advice to vulnerable groups?**

Protective self-separation is recommended for a person who is at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (e.g., older adults, those with chronic underlying medical conditions or immunocompromised) when the virus is circulating in their community.

These are the same groups that are higher risk for seasonal influenza.

They include, for eg, those over 75; those over 60 with long-term medical conditions; adults and children with long-term medical conditions; People with cancer; 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 institutions (including disability, mental health and older persons services);

### **What workplace measures are being recommended?**

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.

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

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; staggered start and finish times; teleworking; reducing face-to-face meetings

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).

### **What restrictions apply on certain care settings?**

Restriction of visiting in hospitals, long term care settings, mental health facilities, prisons and spacing measures in homeless shelters.

These institutions house a large percentage of people in high risk groups for severe disease and poor outcome, and outbreaks of COVID-19 can lead to significant morbidity and mortality.

### **What guidelines are in place for social distancing on public transport?**

Public transport will continue to run. The most important advice for any individual remains good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and refraining from touching your face. Individuals should not use public transport if feeling unwell.

Individuals should look at options like travelling off peak and maximising the distance between fellow passengers. There is no evidence that wearing masks are effective in reducing your risk while travelling. Masks should be reserved for healthcare workers and people who are unwell.