



COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Frequently Asked Questions

The responses set out below are drawn directly from the advice we received from the CMO & D/Health. Where appropriate we have applied these to OPW staff and circumstances.

These responses are valid as of **Wednesday, 18th March** and will be updated as further information is made available.

1. Who should self-isolate

The HSE sets out the criteria for self-isolation at:

www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html

2. What if employees need to self-isolate?

Employees should follow the guidance set out by the HSE and/or their doctor. If medical/HSE advice is that the employee should self-isolate then the employer may consider alternative methods of working.

If it is recommended that an employee self-isolates, and they are not ill, managers may approve homeworking where this is possible and appropriate.

3. What happens now that Crèches/Schools are closed?

OPW will facilitate staff who need to stay at home due to school and crèche closures. However, OPW work continues during this period and staff and managers should be flexible in their approach to ensure business continuity. This may involve working outside normal working hours in an Office or working from home. Where possible and with line manager's approval

staff should work from home to maximise social distancing. If working from home staff should make their line manager aware of their home arrangements and complete a self-declaration form. Employees must stay in regular contact with their managers at all times throughout this period.

The position at this time is that staff will be paid as normal. However, DPER is reviewing the process of managing caring responsibilities during this period and we will advise of further updates as we receive them. [OPW Guidelines on Working at home](#) are available on Stór under OPW Updates and should be read by anyone who is required to work from home. In addition the HSE has issued [guidance on temporarily working from home](#) for employers in this emergency situation.

ICT Unit will try to provide tools to enable working from home as much as possible. Further instructions will issue in regard to remote access.

4. What if an employee does not have the facility to work from home?

Civil and Public Service employers have the discretion to grant special leave with pay as per Circular 02/1976 Part IX. Sectors will



need to refer to their own special leave circulars or arrangements as necessary. Employees other than those required to be at home, as per the [DPER update on working arrangements for the civil and public service](#), should still attend work in line with their organisations business continuity measures.

5. Should self-isolation be recorded as special leave with pay or sick leave?

Special leave with pay should apply when an employee is advised to self-isolate. Medical or HSE confirmation of this advice will be required.

6. What if an employee contracts COVID-19 whilst on special leave with pay?

If the employee was already on special leave with pay as a preventative measure, and subsequently falls ill with Covid-19, then the special leave with pay will continue, rather than sick leave, if the employee is medically diagnosed. However, the continuation of special leave with pay will require medical confirmation from a doctor for the duration. The rules on sick leave will apply and staff should contact their manager and supply confirmation from their doctor.

7. What happens if it turns out, after the period of self-isolation, that an employee does not have the COVID-19 virus?

When the recommended period of self-isolation is passed, please follow medical advice and/or HSE guidelines on return to work.

8. What if an employee does not have COVID-19 but another strain of a flu-related illness?

These types of illnesses should be recorded as ordinary certified sick leave and the usual rules governing sick leave will apply. If the employee is subsequently diagnosed with COVID-19, the special leave with pay can be retrospectively applied in lieu of the sick leave.

9. What if an employee has returned from travel in an affected area?

A decision as to whether or not an employee should self-isolate should be based on [HSE advice/guidelines](#) and/or medical advice.

10. Can the employer ask employees to self-isolate?

Some employees may be asked by the employer to isolate themselves as a precaution in certain circumstances and this would be treated as paid special leave.

11. What about employees who have an underlying medical condition?

If the employee considers themselves to be at risk, they should seek medical advice as to what steps should be taken. The employer should conduct a risk assessment if it is considered that the employee is in a high risk category by reference to HSE guidelines.

12. What is the policy on vulnerable family members?

Follow [HSE protocol](#) in relation to protecting yourself and others?

13. Are the OPW considering the implications of Covid-19 in respect of visitor sites where we have a lot of International travellers?

All Visitor sites are now closed and will not reopen until 29th March, or unless otherwise instructed.

The updated list of sites with affected Visitor facilities together with other locations remaining open is available on the [OPW website](#).

All staff working at these sites, who are rostered on duty are still required to present at work as normal. Where staff are specifically assigned to Visitor-facing roles, they will, as instructed by local supervisory management, address other tasks in the short term.

All staff should continue to report for work at their usual station for the duration of the emergency unless they are ill or have agreed to work from home with their line manager.

Staff who have particular responsibilities in relation to care of children in the coming days will be able to access special leave arrangements as mentioned above.

Sites with scheduled opening dates from now until the 29th March will not open.

14. What is the possibility of OPW staff being redeployed to more critical areas internally or externally?

As per the DPER update essential services are being identified and some staff may be required to cover these services.

15. Can the virus be spread through air conditioning units?

There is currently no evidence of airborne transmission for COVID-19 and therefore the risk of transmission through air

conditioning units is deemed to be very low.

16. Should frontline staff wear face masks?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that healthy people should only wear facemasks if caring for a person who is suspected as having COVID-19.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) advises that there is no evidence that using facemasks is of any benefit to people who are not sick.

As a result, facemasks are **not** recommended for people working with the general public who are feeling well and do not have respiratory symptoms (for example, cough, fever, shortness of breath).

The most important action workers can take to protect themselves from COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is regular hand-washing and good respiratory hygiene.

17. Do I need to wear latex gloves if handling cash?

For people working with the general public who are feeling well and do not have respiratory symptoms (for example, cough, fever, shortness of breath), facemasks and gloves are not recommended. There is no evidence that using masks or gloves in this setting is of any benefit to people who are not sick.

18. Are additional sanitation procedures being put in place in relation to door handles, lift buttons, tea stations etc.?

Our cleaners have been asked to take particular care when cleaning. It is also important that we all practice good respiratory and hand hygiene as set out above.



19. Public Transport curtailment/alternative arrangements and advice for staff travelling between a number of sites/ properties daily?

There is currently no curtailment of public transport services. If this occurs Staff will be informed of alternative arrangements being organised centrally or by the OPW.

20. We operate in a five-storey building. If we have a case among a member of staff, should we close the entire building or just the relevant floor?

In cases where COVID-19 has been confirmed, Public Health Officials will engage in comprehensive contact tracing measures to identify people who may have had close contact with the person who has been diagnosed.

Depending on the level of risk identified during this process, additional precautionary measures may be advised by the HSE to limit further spread of the virus. This will be judged on a case by case basis.

21. What if I have been booked on a OneLearning Training Course?

OneLearning has made the decision to postpone all scheduled training. OneLearning services are now suspended until further notice. Staff in OneLearning have been or will be reassigned on a temporary basis to essential work related to Covid 19. Therefore any requests for OneLearning training will not be dealt with until business as usual resumes.

If you need to contact the L&D team over the coming days and weeks, please send them an e-mail at trainingsection@opw.ie and they will get back to you.

22. What about people in Year 3 of the Annual Leave Cycle?

The National Shared Services Office has informed us that due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the various challenges facing Departments, a special once off arrangement will be put in place for officers currently in cycle Year 3. Records of all officers on an April/March or May/April annual leave year currently in cycle year 3, will revert to cycle year 2 for the 2019/20 leave year, as part of an IT update. This will allow officers additional time to avail of their annual leave during the 2020/21 annual leave year. Any officer in year 3 at the end of the 2020/21 annual leave year will have the carry over rules of Circular 27/2003 applied to them as normal. No action is required on your part as the above update will be applied via IT update.

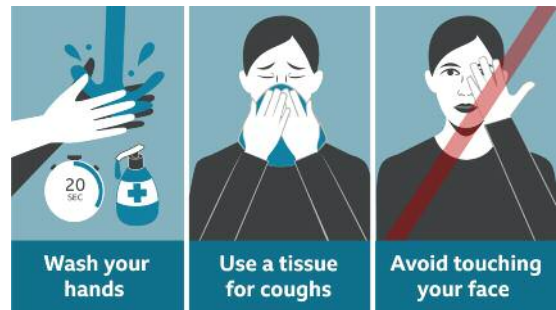


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How to protect yourself

Good respiratory and hand hygiene is the most effective way of protecting yourself from contracting COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

- **Wash your hands** properly and regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands
- **Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth** if your hands are not clean



In the workplace:

- **Make sure your workplaces are clean and hygienic.** Clean surfaces and objects such as computers and phones regularly with disinfectant.
- Good respiratory and hand hygiene.
- Consult the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website for latest travel advice.

How it is spread

- **Directly**, through **contact with an infected person's body fluids** (for example, droplets from coughing or sneezing)
- **Indirectly**, through **contact with surfaces that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on** and which are, therefore, contaminated with the virus.



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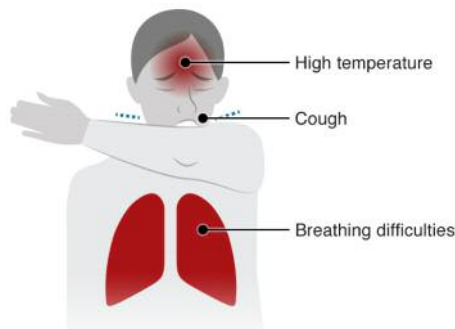
Risk Categories

At present, the main risk factors for determining whether you might have COVID-19 are:

- If you have **been to an affected region** in the last 14 days and have symptoms.
- If you've **been in close contact** with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days and have symptoms.

Symptoms include:

- High Temperature
- Cough
- Breathing Difficulties



If you have any of the symptoms **and** you fall into one of the two the risk categories above, you should immediately take the following actions:

- Stay at home and away from other people**
- Phone a GP without delay**

If you fall into one of the two risk categories **and do not** have symptoms you should visit www.hse.ie for advice and guidance.

For further information and updates on Covid-19:

The list of affected regions can be found on www.hse.ie

The World Health Organisation website in relation to symptom-spotting may also be helpful. www.who.int

HSE: www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/

OPW: [Stór](#) – is being updated regularly on how this emergency affects us.

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) provides more technical information for employers and health professionals on its website:

www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/