

# **COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools**

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This is a living document and may be reviewed and amended to take into account new guidance from [www.Gov.ie](http://www.Gov.ie), [www.dbei.ie](http://www.dbei.ie), [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie), [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie), [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie); [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) or agreements with education partners as appropriate for primary and special schools.

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## **1) Introduction**

A revision of the COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools is necessary to ensure that it is in compliance with the Government's Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19 and the 'Work Safely Protocol' which has been developed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health with guidance documents provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA).

The 'Work Safely Protocol' is a revised version of the 'Return to Work Safely Protocol' and contains many of the elements and features of the original guidance but is updated to reflect the latest advice issued by Government and National Health Emergency Team (NPHET) to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Each workplace is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan. In addition to being places of learning, schools are also places of work. This document sets out the information that primary schools need to review their school COVID-19 Response Plan, including a COVID-19 policy, lead worker representative and process to deal with a suspected case of COVID-19.

The purpose of this document is to provide clear and helpful guidance for the safe operation through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in primary and special schools. It provides key messages to minimise the risk of COVID-19 for staff, pupils, families and the wider community while recognising the importance of education for the health and wellbeing of pupils and society as a whole.

This document focuses on the practical steps which can be taken in primary and special schools to minimise the risk of the introduction of infection into schools while recognising that no interpersonal activity is without risk of transmission of infection at any time. The documentation and templates in this booklet are supported by the public health advice provided by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) for the safe reopening of schools and educational facilities. That report is available [here](#).

Further advice from the HPSC on the use of face coverings in educational settings was received on the 6th August 2020. This advice is available [here](#).

One of the key challenges is to balance the need for a practical and sensible level of caution with the need to provide a supportive environment for teaching and learning. This document identifies the steps schools can take to do everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school and the steps that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the spread within the school itself.

The Department has worked intensively with the education partners to develop consistent plans, advice, protocols and guidance for schools, including the School COVID-19 Response plan. There is a suite of documentation available to support schools to continue to operate safely and fully including guidance on learning, school programmes and wellbeing for the 2020/21 school year. There is also information on funding, staffing and resources to schools to support COVID-19 measures. Schools are advised to familiarise themselves with these documents. All of the documents will be available at [gov.ie/backtoschool](https://www.gov.ie/backtoschool)

## **2) What is a COVID-19 Response Plan?**

A COVID-19 Response Plan is designed to support the staff and Board of Management (BOM) in putting measures in place that aim to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the school environment.

The COVID-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for a school to meet the Government's 'Work Safely Protocol', to prevent the introduction and spread of Covid-19 in the school environment.

It is important that school-based teaching and learning and the operation of school facilities complies with the public health advice and guidance documents prepared by the Department. Doing so minimises the risk to pupils, staff and others. The response plan supports the sustainable operation of schools where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and pupils while promoting the educational and development needs of the pupils in the school. The COVID-19 response plan is a living document and will be updated in line with the public health advice as appropriate for primary and special schools.

In line with the Work Safely Protocol, the key to maintaining a safe school requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the BOM/ETB, staff, pupils and parents.

The assistance and co-operation of all staff, pupils, parents, contractors and visitors is critical to the continued success of the plan.

*Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided in this document. However, should errors or omissions be identified, please notify us so that appropriate measures can be taken to rectify same.*

## **3) School COVID-19 Policy**

A COVID-19 policy outlines the ongoing commitment of the school to implementing the plan and help prevent the introduction and spread of the virus. The revised updated policy has been signed and dated by the Chairperson and Principal of Mercy Primary School and brought to the attention of the staff, pupils, parents and others.

### **Mercy Primary School COVID-19 Policy Statement**

Mercy Primary School is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our pupils. To ensure that, we have developed and updated the following COVID-19 Response Plan. The BOM and all school

staff are responsible for the implementation of this plan and a combined effort will help contain the spread of the virus. We will:

- continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff
- provide up to date information to our staff and pupils on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct hand-washing techniques
- agree with staff, a worker representative who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan
- inform all staff and pupils of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
- adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the guidance and direction of the Department of Education
- keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
- ensure staff engage with the induction/familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education
- implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
- provide instructions for staff and pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
- implement cleaning in line with Department of Education advice

All school staff will be consulted on an ongoing basis and feedback is encouraged on any concerns, issues or suggestions.

This can be done through the Lead Worker Representative(s), who will be supported in line with the agreement between the Department and education partners.

Signed: *Barbara Hanamy*  
Principal

*Brian T Kennedy*  
Chairperson

#### **4) Reviewing the safe operation of schools**

The BOM aims to facilitate the continuation of school based teaching and learning and a safe working environment for staff. The operation of schools must be done safely and in strict adherence to the public health advice and any guidance issued by the Department of Education.

Details for the safe operation of a school facility and the applicable controls are outlined in this document. Each school will need to review their current processes to ensure that they include the following:

- Arrangements to keep up to date with public health advice, changes to any Government plans for living with COVID-19 and Department of Education updates;
- Arrangements to pass on this information in a timely manner to staff, pupils, parents and others as required;
- Ensured that staff have reviewed the training materials provided by the Department of Education **(details at Section 4.1);**
- Provided staff with access to the Return to Work (RTW) form **(details at Section 4.2);**
- Identified a Lead Worker representative **(details at Section 4.3);**
- Displayed posters and other signage to prevent introduction and spread of COVID-19 **(details at Section 4.4);**
- Made the necessary changes to the school or classroom layout if necessary to support the redesign of classrooms to support physical distancing **(details at Section 4.5);**
- Removed unnecessary clutter to facilitate ongoing cleaning of the school taking into account the importance of having educational materials to create a stimulating learning environment;
- Updated the health and safety risk assessment **(details at Section 4.6);**
- Made necessary arrangements to limit access to the school to necessary visitors and maintain records of contacts to the school **(details at 4.7);**
- Reviewed the school buildings to check the following after any period of closure:
  - Does the water system need flushing at outlets following low usage to prevent Legionella disease;
  - Has school equipment and mechanical ventilation been checked for signs of deterioration or damage before being used again;
  - Have bin collections and other essential services resumed.

There are checklists in place to assist schools on the details of what is needed for these arrangements in the Appendices of this plan.

#### **4.1) Induction Training**

All staff will undertake and complete Covid-19 Induction Training prior to returning to the school building. The aim of such training is to ensure that staff have full knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Latest up to-date advice and guidance on public health;
- Covid-19 symptoms;
- What to do if a staff member or pupil develops symptoms of Covid-19 while at school;



- Outline of the Covid-19 response plan.

Staff will be kept fully informed of the control measures in place in the school and their duties and responsibilities in preventing the spread of Covid-19 and will be updated with any changes to the control measures or guidance available from the public health authorities.

If a staff member is unsure about any aspect of the COVID-19 Response Plan, the associated control measures, or his/her duties, he/she should immediately seek guidance from the Principal, who is supported in this role by the BOM.

#### **4.2) Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)**

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a **Return to Work (RTW)** form, which is available online or from the Principal.

A RTW form should be completed and returned to the school before returning to work. Schools should request staff (verbally or in writing) to confirm that the details in the pre-return to work form remain unchanged following subsequent periods of closure such as school holidays. The principal will also provide details of the **Induction Training** for completion by staff and details of any additional health and safety measures in place in the school to facilitate the staff member's return to the school facility.

There are some school staff who may be unable to return to school. Current public health guidelines have identified these people as being in groups who are defined as being at **very high risk**. This will be updated in line with public health advice.

#### **People at very high risk (extremely vulnerable):**

The list of people in very high risk groups include people who:

- are over 70 years of age - even if fit and well
- have had an organ transplant
- are undergoing active chemotherapy for cancer
- are having radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- are having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- have severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, lung fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and severe COPD

- have a condition that means they have a very high risk of getting infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- are taking medicine that makes you much more likely to get infections (such as high doses of steroids or immunosuppression therapies)
- have a serious heart condition and are pregnant

The advice for this group is available from the HSE. Details of the working arrangements that apply to the very high risk school staff, is in accordance with those applying for the public service generally, and is detailed in the relevant Department of Education circulars available on the Department's website.

#### **4.3) Lead Worker Representative**

The Protocol provides for the appointment of a Lead Worker Representative (LWR) in each workplace. The LWR will work in collaboration with the employer to assist in the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of COVID -19 and monitor adherence to those measures and to be involved in communicating the health advice around COVID-19 in the workplace.

This section sets out how the provisions will operate in schools. The process for appointment of the lead worker representative in schools has been agreed centrally between the Department of Education and the education partners.

Responsibility for the development, updating and implementation of the COVID-19 Response Plan and the associated control measures lies primarily with the Board of Management and school management.

Strong communication and a shared collaborative approach is key to protecting against the spread of COVID-19 in schools, and looking after the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students. Adherence to the Work Safely Protocol will only be achieved if everyone has a shared responsibility in implementing the measures contained within the Protocol in their place of work.

If a staff member has any concerns or observations in relation to the COVID-19 Response Plan, control measures or the adherence to such measures by staff, pupils or others he/she should contact the lead worker(s) who will engage with the Principal/BOM.

#### **Role of the Lead Worker Representative**

In summary, the role of the LWR is to:

- Represent all staff in the workplace regardless of role, and be aware of specific issues that may arise in respect of different staff cohorts;

- Work collaboratively with school management to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19;
- Keep up to date with the latest COVID-19 public health advice;
- In conjunction with school management, promote good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette along with maintaining social distancing in accordance with public health advice;
- Assist school management with implementing infection prevention control measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace in line with the Work Safely Protocol and current public health advice;
- In conjunction with school management, monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19;
- Conduct regular reviews of safety measures;
- Report any issues of concern immediately to school management and keep records of such issues and actions taken to rectify them;
- Consult with the school management on the school’s COVID-19 Response Plan in the event of someone developing COVID-19 while in school including the location of an isolation area and a safe route to that area;
- Following any incident, assess with the school management any follow up action that is required;
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace;
- Make representations to school management on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.

Every school will appoint one Lead Worker Representative

In schools with less than 30 staff, a Deputy Lead Worker Representative will be appointed in addition to the LWR. The role of the Deputy LWR will be to deputise as LWR where the LWR is absent.

In schools with 30 or more staff and in all Special schools, an Assistant Lead Worker Representative will be appointed in addition to the LWR. The role of the Assistant LWR will be to:

- assist the LWR in their duties as set out above; and
- deputise as LWR where the LWR is absent

<b><i>Name(s) of lead worker representative:</i></b>	<b><i>Contact details:</i></b>
Ann Murray	amurray@mercyprimaryschool.ie

All staff, pupils, parents, contractors and visitors have a responsibility both as individuals and collectively to have due regard for their own health and safety and that of others and to assist with the implementation of the COVID-19 Response Plan and associated infection prevention control measures.

#### **4.4) Signage**

Schools will be required to display signage outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene.

The Department has provided printed posters to schools, with age appropriate key health messages – hand washing, sneeze and cough etiquette etc.

#### **4.5) Making Changes to School Layout**

Maintaining physical distancing in the school environment is recommended as one of the key infection prevention control measures to minimise the risk of the introduction and spread of COVID-19. In Mercy Primary School we have reconfigured classrooms and other areas as necessary to support physical distancing in line with the guidance in advance of school reopening.

#### **4.6) Health and Safety Risk Assessment**

COVID-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. It is important that schools review their emergency procedures involving, fire safety, first aid, accidents and dangerous occurrences to consider any new risks that arise due to the school's COVID-19 Response Plan. Any changes to the school's existing emergency procedures should be documented and incorporated into the school's safety statement.

Mercy Primary School has reviewed their existing risk assessment. .

#### **First Aid/Emergency Procedure**

The standard First Aid/emergency procedure shall continue to apply in schools. In an emergency or in case of a serious incident, schools should call for an ambulance or the fire brigade on 112/999 giving details of location and type of medical incident.

#### **4.7) Access to School and Contact Log**

Access to the school building will be in line with agreed school procedures.

Arrangements for necessary visitors such as contractors and parents will be restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained prior approval from the principal. The Department of Education Inspectorate may also need to visit schools and

centres for education to support them as appropriate in the implementation of public health advice relating to creating a safe learning and working environment for all.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in restricting the spread of the virus and protecting the health and safety of the individuals themselves and other staff, contractors and visitors at the workplace. A detailed sign in/sign out log of those entering the school facilities should be maintained. The school should maintain a log of staff and pupil contacts.

## **5) Infection Prevention Control Measures - To prevent Introduction and Spread of COVID-19 in Schools**

One of the key messages to manage the risks of COVID-19 is to do everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school. If infection is not introduced it cannot be spread. The risk of spreading the infection once introduced exists in all interpersonal interactions; pupil-pupil, teacher-teacher and teacher- pupil and must be managed in all settings.

A range of essential control measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of the spread of Covid-19 virus and to protect the safety, health and welfare of staff, pupils, parents and visitors as far as possible within the school. The control measures shall continue to be reviewed and updated as required on an ongoing basis.

It is critical that staff, pupils, parents and visitors are aware of, and adhere to, the control measures outlined and that they fully cooperate with all health and safety requirements. *Staff should note that they have a legal obligation under Section 13 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to comply with health and safety requirements and to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves, their colleagues and other parties within the workplace.*

### **How to Minimise the Risk of Introduction of COVID-19 into Schools:**

Promote awareness of COVID-19 symptoms (***details at Section 5.1***);

- Advise staff and pupils that have symptoms not to attend school, to phone their doctor and to follow HSE guidance on self-isolation;
- Advise staff and pupils to self-isolate or restrict their movements at home if they display any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and contact their family doctor to arrange a test
- Advise staff and pupils not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:
  - if they are identified by the HSE as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19
  - if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus

- If they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel
- Advise staff and pupils to co-operate with any public health officials and the school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice in the event of a case or outbreak in the school;
- Advise staff and pupils that develop symptoms at school to bring this to the attention of the Principal promptly;
- Ensure that staff and pupils know the protocol for managing a suspected case of COVID-19 in school
- Everyone entering the school building needs to perform hand hygiene with a hand sanitiser;
- Visitors to the school during the day should be by prior arrangement and should be received at a specific contact point;
- Physical distancing (of 2m) should be maintained between staff and visitors where possible.

### **5.1) Know the Symptoms of COVID-19**

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 it is important to know and recognise the symptoms. They are:

- ✓ High temperature
- ✓ Cough
- ✓ Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- ✓ Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

Infection with the virus that causes COVID-19 can cause illness, ranging from mild to severe, and, in some cases, can be fatal. It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show. They can be similar to symptoms of cold and flu.

Common symptoms of coronavirus include:

- a fever (high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above).
- a new cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry.
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties.
- loss or change in your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

If you have any common symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), self-isolate (stay in your room) and phone your family doctor straight away to see if you need a COVID-19 test. Other people in your household will need to restrict their movements (stay at home).

Getting an early diagnosis means, you can get the help you need and take steps to avoid spreading the virus, if you have it.

For the complete list of symptoms, please refer to the HSE Website.

### **COVID-19 Tracker App**

COVID Tracker app is a free and easy-to-use mobile phone app that will:

- alert you if you have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 (coronavirus)
- keep other app users safe by alerting them if you test positive for COVID-19
- give you advice on what to do if you have symptoms

You can download the free app from Apple's AppStore or the GooglePlay store

### **5.2) Respiratory Hygiene**

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and safely into a nearby bin.

By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and Covid-19.

### **5.3) Hand Hygiene**

Staff and pupils should understand why hand hygiene is important as well as when and how to wash their hands.

Schools should promote good hygiene and display posters throughout the schools on how to wash your hands. Follow the HSE guidelines on handwashing:

<https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

Hand hygiene can be achieved by hand washing or use of a hand sanitiser (when hands look clean).

Use of hand hygiene facilities including wash hand basins needs to be managed so as to avoid congregation of pupils and staff waiting to use wash hand basins and hand sanitisers.

There is a requirement for access to hand washing facilities after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands.

Hand sanitiser dispensers can be deployed more readily at exit and entry points of schools and classrooms and care should be taken to clean up any hand sanitiser spills to prevent risks of falls.

Warm water is preferable to hot or cold water for hand washing but if the plumbing system only supplies cold water, a soap that emulsifies easily in cold water should be used.

Wash hand basins, running water, liquid soap and hand drying facilities should be provided in all toilets, kitchens and any food preparation areas.

Hand washing facilities should be maintained in good condition and supplies of soap and towels should be topped up regularly to encourage everyone to use them.

Hot air dryers are an acceptable alternative for hand drying but must be regularly maintained. There is no evidence that hand dryers are associated with increased risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Posters displaying hand washing techniques and promoting hand washing should be placed on walls adjacent to washing facilities and can be laminated or placed in a plastic sleeve.

Hand sanitiser is suitable for use for hand hygiene when hands are not visibly soiled (look clean).

Evidence of effectiveness is best for alcohol based hand rubs but non-alcohol based hand rubs can be used too.

When hand rubs/gels are being used in school care should be taken to ensure that pupils do not ingest them as they are flammable and toxic. Alcohol-based sanitiser must not be stored or used near heat or naked flame.

Young children should not have independent use of containers of alcohol gel.

### **Frequency of Hand Hygiene**

Pupils and staff should perform hand hygiene:

- On arrival at school;
- Before eating or drinking;
- After using the toilet;
- After playing outdoors;
- When their hands are physically dirty;
- When they cough or sneeze.

The Department has arranged for a drawdown framework to be established to enable schools purchase hand-sanitisers and any other necessary PPE supplies for use in the school. The Department will provide funding for the costs associated with hand sanitising and PPE requirements in schools.



#### **5.4) Physical Distancing**

Physical distancing can be usefully applied in primary and special school settings allowing for some flexibility when needed. It must be applied in a practical way to recognise that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue. Physical distancing will look different across the various ages and stages of learning. Care should be taken to avoid generating tension or potential conflict and some flexibility in the implementation of measures may be required at times.

It is also recognised that it is not always possible for staff to maintain physical distance from pupils and it is not appropriate that they would always be expected to do so where this could have a detrimental impact on the pupil i.e. if a child sustains an injury and requires first aid.

**However, where possible staff should maintain a minimum of 1m distance and where possible 2m. They should also take measures to avoid close contact at face to face level such as remaining standing rather than sitting beside/crouching down.**

Physical distancing falls into two categories:

- Increasing separation
- Decreasing interaction

##### ***Increasing separation***

To maintain physical distancing in the classroom, primary schools and special schools should:

1. Reconfigure class spaces to maximise physical distancing
2. Utilise and reconfigure all available space in the school in order to maximise physical distancing

**The teacher's desk should be at least 1m and where possible 2m away from pupil desks.**

##### ***Decreasing interaction***

The extent to which decreasing interaction is possible in a primary or special school will depend on the school setting and a common-sense approach is required recognising the limits to which this can be achieved between pupils.

In primary and special schools a distance of 1m should be maintained between desks or between individual pupils. It is recognised that younger children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing indoors. Therefore achieving this recommendation in the first four years of primary or special schools, is not a pre-requisite to reopening a primary or special school for all pupils.

Where possible work stations should be allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces which are shared.

The risk of infection may be reduced by structuring pupils and their teachers into Class Bubbles (ie a class grouping which stays apart from other classes as much as possible) and discrete groups or “Pods” within those class bubbles, to the extent that this is practical. If the class is divided into Pods, there should be at least (1m distance) between individual Pods within the Class Bubble and between individuals in the pod, whenever possible. Generally speaking the objective is to limit contact and sharing of common facilities between people in different Class Bubbles (and Pods within those Class Bubbles) as much as possible, rather than to avoid all contact between Pods, as the latter will not always be possible.

The aim of the system within the school is that class grouping mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until departure at the end of the school day. The Pods within those Class Bubbles is an additional measures, to limit the extent of close contact within the Class Bubble.

Pod sizes should be kept as small as is likely to be reasonably practical in the specific classroom context.

To the greatest extent possible, pupils and teaching staff should consistently be in the same Class Bubbles although this will not be possible at all times.

Sharing educational material between Pods should be avoided/minimised where possible.

Staff members who move from class bubble to class bubble should be limited as much as possible.

***Additional measures to decrease interaction include:***

- Limit interaction on arrival and departure and in hallways and other shared areas.
- Social physical contact (hand to hand greetings, hugs) should be discouraged.
- Where pupils need to move about within the classroom to perform activities (access to a shared resource) it should be organized to the greatest degree possible to minimize congregation at the shared resource.
- Staff and pupils should avoid sharing of personal items.
- Encourage pupils to avoid behaviours that involve hand to mouth contact (putting pens/pencils in the mouth).
- Where teaching and learning involves use of keyboards or tablets, the contact surface of the device should be cleaned regularly and hand hygiene encouraged.

**Physical Distancing outside of the classroom and within the school**

***School drop off/collection***

Arrangements for dropping off/collecting pupils should be arranged to encourage physical distancing of 2m where possible.

Walking/cycling to school should be encouraged as much as possible.

Arrangements should be made to maintain a distance of 2m between parents and guardians and between parents and guardians and school staff.

Aim of any arrangements is to avoid congregation of people at the school gates where physical distancing may not be respected.

Staggered drop off/pick up times should be considered where practical and feasible.

If schools have additional access points, consideration may be given to whether they can be used to reduce congestion.

Consideration may be given to where pupils congregate as they arrive at school. This could include heading straight to their small group designated learning space/classroom.

### ***Staff***

A distance of 2m is recommended for physical distancing by staff. This is particularly relevant to distancing between adults when they are not engaged in teaching such as the staff room and arriving to work.

If 2m cannot be maintained in staff groups, as much as distance as is possible and updated guidance on face covering should be observed.

Physical distancing should be observed between staff members within the staff room through the use of staggered breaks etc.

Staff meetings should be held remotely or in small groups or in large spaces to facilitate physical distancing.

Implement no hand shaking policy.

Minimise gathering of school staff at the beginning or end of the school day.

Staff can rotate between areas/classes but this should be minimized where possible.

### ***Corridors and Stairwells***

Briefly passing someone in a hall is very unlikely to contribute significantly to the spread of infection if people do not have physical contact and avoid informal group discussions.

### ***Yard/Supervision***

The risk of transmission from contact with outside surfaces or play areas is low.

Adjust play time/outdoor activities to minimise crowding at the entrance and exits.

It is not possible to maintain physical distancing when pupils in primary or special schools play together outdoors, but in so far as practical it is helpful to keep to consistent groups. Children should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene before and after outdoor activities.

Minimise equipment sharing and clean shared equipment between uses by different people.

### **Ventilation**

The Department has published guidance setting out the practical steps for good ventilation in accordance with public health advice '*Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools*'. The guidance sets out an overall approach for schools that windows should be open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times (assuming not in use) and also at the end of each school day) and partially open when classrooms are in use. The guidance provides that good ventilation can be achieved in classrooms without causing discomfort, particularly during cold weather.

### **5.5) Use of PPE in Schools**

The Department has published "[Guidance to Primary and Special Schools on PPE consumables and equipment](https://www.gov.ie/backtoschool)" on [www.gov.ie/backtoschool](https://www.gov.ie/backtoschool)

This provides schools with the information needed on the appropriate quantities of PPE consumables and equipment to support the full and safe reopening of schools.

The updated advice from the HPSC to the Department of Education has recommended that face coverings should be worn by staff members where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff, parents, essential visitors or pupils. The Department has accepted this recommendation. Accordingly, it is now a requirement for face coverings to be worn by staff members where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff, parents, essential visitors or pupils.

PPE will also need to be used at certain work activities or work areas. These might include roles such as:

- Performing intimate care
- Where a suspected case of COVID-19 is identified while the school is in operation
- Where staff are particularly vulnerable to infection but are not in the list of those categorised as people in very high risk groups, or may be living with people who are in a very high risk category
- Administering first aid
- Parent Teacher meetings

Where staff provide healthcare to children with medical needs in the school environment they should apply standard precautions as per usual practice.

### **Reception Areas**

Consideration should be given to the use of Perspex in reception areas where it is not possible for staff to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff or pupils. Minor works funding grant can be used for this purpose.

### **Face Coverings/Face Visors/Masks**

Cloth face coverings act as a barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from travelling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the face covering coughs, sneezes, talks or raises their voice. Cloth face coverings are therefore intended to prevent transmission of the virus from the wearer (who may not know that they are infected) to those with whom they come into close contact.

In childcare and educational settings, the implementation of mandatory face-covering usage is challenging, as it is known that children will have a lower tolerance and ability to use the face covering properly, and use of face-coverings by teachers and staff caring for very young children may cause undue stress to the children.

It is not recommended that children attending primary school wear face-coverings.

It is now a requirement for face coverings to be worn by staff members where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff, parents, essential visitors or pupils.

In certain situations the use of clear visors should be considered, for example staff interacting with pupils with hearing difficulties or learning difficulties.

Cloth face coverings should not be worn by any of the following groups:

- Primary school children
- Any person with difficulty breathing
- Any person who is unconscious or incapacitated
- Any person who is unable to remove the face-covering without assistance
- Any person who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering, for example persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

All staff wearing face coverings should be reminded to not touch the face covering and to wash or sanitise their hands (using hand sanitiser) before putting on and after taking off the face covering.

Information should be provided on the proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6ZqdpLfSqw>

Cloth face coverings should be washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled.

Face coverings should not be worn if they are wet. A wet cloth face covering may make it difficult to breathe.

Schools should consider having additional disposable face coverings available for staff in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day.

Whilst staff may wish to utilise their own face covering on a day-to-day basis, schools should have available a stock of additional disposable or multi-use face coverings, or if appropriate face visors, available for staff in case a back-up face covering is needed throughout the day or where required on an ongoing basis.

On the use of face masks by staff, schools should consider the specific circumstances where the use of medical face masks, to EU Standard EN 14683, may be more appropriate for staff (for example where staff by necessity need to be in close and continued proximity with pupils with intimate care needs such as SNAs or School Bus Escorts).

Wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.

### **Gloves**

The use of disposable gloves in the school by pupils or staff is not generally appropriate but may be necessary for cleaning, intimate care settings and when administering first aid. Routine use does not protect the wearer and may expose others to risk from contaminated gloves. Routine use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for hand hygiene.

### **Aprons**

Aprons may also be appropriate in certain circumstances including for intimate care needs or for staff assigned to cleaning an area where a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 was present.

## **6) Impact of COVID-19 on certain school activities**

The Department will work with stakeholders to provide more detailed advice on certain schools activities in advance of school reopening.

### *Choir/Music Performance*

Choir practices/performance and music practices/performance involving wind instruments may pose a higher level of risk and special consideration should be given to how they are held ensuring that the room is well-ventilated and the distance between performers is maintained.

### *Sport Activities*

Schools should refer to the HPSC guidance on Return to Sport. Link to return to sport protocols is found here.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/07253-return-to-sport-protocols/>

### *Shared Equipment*

#### Toys

- All toys should be cleaned on a regular basis for example weekly. This will remove dust and dirt that can harbour germs.
- Toys that are visibly dirty or contaminated with blood or bodily fluids should be taken out of use immediately for cleaning or disposal.
- When purchasing toys choose ones that are easy to clean and disinfect (when necessary).
- If cloth or soft toys are used they should be machine washable.
- Jigsaws, puzzles and toys that young pupils to those with special educational needs may be inclined to put into their mouths should be capable of being washed and disinfected.
- All play equipment should be checked for signs of damage for example breaks or cracks. If they cannot be repaired or cleaned they should be discarded.
- Clean toys and equipment should be stored in a clean container or clean cupboard. The manufacturer's instructions should always be followed.
- At this time soft modelling materials and play dough where used should be for individual use only.

#### Cleaning Procedure for Toys

- Wash the toy in warm soapy water, using a brush to get into crevices.
- Rinse the toy in clean water.
- Thoroughly dry the toy.
- Some hard plastic toys may be suitable for cleaning in the dishwasher.
- Toys that cannot be immersed in water that is electronic or wind up should be wiped with a damp cloth and dried.
- In some situations toys/equipment may need to be disinfected following cleaning for example: toys/equipment that pupils place in their mouths. Toys/equipment that have been soiled with blood or body fluids or toys where a case of COVID-19 has been identified.
- If disinfection is required: A chlorine releasing disinfectant should be used diluted to a concentration of 1,000ppm available chlorine. The item should be rinsed and dried thoroughly.

Art – Where possible pupils should be encouraged to have their own individual art and equipment supplies.

Electronics – Shared electronic devices such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards should be cleaned between use and consideration could be given to the use of wipeable covers for electronics to facilitate cleaning.

Musical Equipment/Instruments – To the greatest extent possible, instruments should not be shared between pupils and if sharing is required, the instruments should be cleaned between uses.

Library Policy – Where practical pupils should have their own books. Textbooks that are shared should be covered in a wipeable plastic covering that can be wiped with a suitable household cleaning agent between uses. Pupils should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene after using any shared item.

Shared Sports Equipment – Minimise equipment sharing and clean shared equipment between uses by different people.

## **7) Hygiene and Cleaning in Schools**

The Department of Education has provided additional funding to schools to support the enhanced cleaning required to minimise the risks of COVID-19. Details of the funding supports have been provided to schools by way of circular and will be updated as required.

The specific advice in relation to school cleaning is set out in the HPSC advice and is covered in the induction training. This advice sets out the cleaning regime required to support schools to prevent COVID-19 infections and the enhanced cleaning required in the event of a suspected cases of COVID-19. Schools are asked to carefully read and understand the cleaning advice and to apply that to all areas of the school as appropriate. Schools are reminded to take particular care of the hygiene arrangements for hand washing and toilet facilities.

In summary, each school setting should be cleaned at **least once per day**. Additional cleaning if available should be focused on frequently touched surfaces – door handles, hand rails, chairs/arm rests, communal eating areas, sink and toilet facilities.

All staff will have access to cleaning products and will be required to maintain cleanliness of their own work area. Under no circumstances should these cleaning materials be removed from the building.

Staff should thoroughly clean and disinfect their work area before and after use each day. There should be regular collection of used waste disposal bags from offices and other areas within the school facility.

Staff must use and clean their own equipment and utensils (cup, cutlery, plate etc.)

### ***Cleaning/Disinfecting rooms where a pupil/staff member with suspected COVID-19 was present***

- The room should be cleaned as soon as practicably possible.
- Once the room is vacated the room should not be reused until the room has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry.
- Disinfection only works on things that are clean. When disinfection is required it is always as well as cleaning.
- Person assigned to cleaning should avoid touching their face while they are cleaning and should wear household gloves and a plastic apron.



- Clean the environment and furniture using disposable cleaning cloths and a household detergent followed by disinfection with a chlorine based product (household bleach).
- Pay special attention to frequently touched surfaces, the back of chairs, couches, door handles and any surfaces that are visibly soiled with body fluids.
- Once the room has been cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry, the room can be reused.
- If a pupil or staff diagnosed with COVID-19 spent time in a communal area like a canteen, play area or if they used the toilet or bathroom facilities, then the areas should be cleaned with household detergent followed by a disinfectant (as outlined in the HPSC interim health advice) as soon as is practically possible.

### **8) Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19**

Staff or pupils should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19. The following outlines how a school should deal with a suspected case that may arise in a school setting.

A designated isolation area should be identified within the school building. The possibility of having more than one person displaying signs of COVID-19 should be considered and a contingency plan for dealing with additional cases put in place. The designated isolation area should be behind a closed door and away from other staff and pupils.

If a staff member/pupil displays symptoms of COVID-19 while at school the following are the procedures to be implemented:

- If the person with the suspected case is a pupil, the parents/guardians should be contacted immediately;
- Isolate the person and have a procedure in place to accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2m away from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2m from the symptomatic person at all times;
- The isolation area does not have to be a room but if it is not a room it should be 2m away from others in the room;
- If it is not possible to maintain a distance of 2m, a staff member caring for a pupil should wear a face covering or mask. Gloves should not be used as the virus does not pass through skin;
- Provide a mask for the person presenting with symptoms. He/she should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises;
- Assess whether the individual who is displaying symptoms can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by parents who will call their doctor and continue self-isolation at home;
- Facilitate the person presenting with symptoms remaining in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and facilitate them calling their doctor. The

individual should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects. Advice should be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the waste bag provided;

- If the person is well enough to go home, arrange for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and advise them to inform their general practitioner by phone of their symptoms. Public transport of any kind should not be used;
- If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is a Covid-19 suspect;
- Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery;
- Arrange for appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and work areas involved.
- 

The HSE will inform any staff/parents who have come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process. The HSE will contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of COVID-19 is made. The instructions of the HSE should be followed and staff and pupil confidentiality is essential at all times. School staff should be encouraged to download the HSE COVID-19 tracker app to assist Public Health for contract tracing purposes. Both in and out of the school setting.

## **9) Special Educational Needs**

### **Additional considerations for those with Special Educational Needs**

For children with special educational needs (SEN) maintaining physical distancing in many instances will not be practical or appropriate to implement. The focus should therefore be on emphasising that parents/guardians should have a heightened awareness of signs, symptoms or changes in baseline which suggests illness/COVID-19 infection and where symptoms are present children should not attend school.

Similarly staff should be aware of their responsibility not to attend work if they develop signs or symptoms of respiratory illness.

#### *Hand hygiene*

Children who are unable to wash their hands by themselves should be assisted to clean their hands using soap and water or a hand sanitiser (if their hands are visibly clean) as outlined previously.

#### *Equipment*

Some children may have care needs (physical or behavioural) which requires the use of aids and appliances and/or medical equipment for example toileting aids, moving and

handling equipment, respiratory equipment. Where cleaning of aids and appliances is carried out in the school it is recommended that a cleaning schedule is provided, detailing when and how the equipment is cleaned and the cleaning products to be used in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions.

The following points can guide the development of such cleaning schedule:

- Equipment used to deliver care should be visibly clean;
- Care equipment should be cleaned in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions. Cleaning is generally achieved using a general purpose detergent and warm water.
- Equipment that is used on different children must be cleaned and, if required, disinfected immediately after use and before use by another child e.g. toileting aids;
- If equipment is soiled with body fluids:
  - First clean thoroughly with detergent and water;
  - Then disinfect by wiping with a freshly prepared solution of disinfectant;
  - Rinse with water and dry.

## **10) Staff Duties**

Staff have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties. The co-operation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play. In this regard and in order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adhere to the School COVID-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined.
- Complete the RTW form before they return to work.
- Must inform the Principal if there are any other circumstances relating to COVID19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace.
- Must complete COVID-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to their return to school.
- Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices.
- Coordinate and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained.
- Make themselves aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their own wellbeing.

- Self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of COVID-19.
- Not return to or attend school if they have symptoms of COVID-19 under any circumstances.
- Not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:
  - if they are identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19
  - if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus
  - If they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel.
- If they develop any symptoms of COVID-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above.
- Keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.
- Co-operate with any public health personnel and their school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice given in the event of a case or outbreak in their school
- Undergo any COVID-19 testing that may be required as part of mass or serial testing as advised by Public Health

## **11) COVID-19 related Absence Management**

The management of a COVID-19 related absence will be managed in line with agreed procedures with the Department of Education.

## **12) Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

The Department recognises the need for school staff wellbeing and collective self-care. Support for school staff wellbeing will be provided by Department Support Services including the PDST and CSL, as well as by the HSE's Health Promotion Team. An Occupational Health Strategy is in place as a supportive resource for staff in schools. The aim of the Occupational Health Strategy is to promote the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace, with a strong focus on prevention. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises the Employee Assistance Service and the Occupational Health Service. The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is provided by Spectrum.Life under the logo of '*Wellbeing Together: Folláinne Le Chéile*'.

The EAS is a self-referral service where employees have access to a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year providing advice on a range of issues such as wellbeing, legal, financial, mediation, management support etc. The service is also available via SMS, WhatsApp, e-mail, live chat and call

back request. All points of contact for the service are qualified, accredited and experienced mental health professionals.

Where required, short-term counselling is available to employees and their families (over the age of 18 years and living at home).

A bespoke wellbeing portal and app is available which offers access to podcasts, blogs, live chats and videos on topics around wellbeing and mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition. E-Learning programmes across mental health, sleep and a range of wellbeing topics are also available. In addition online cognitive behavioural therapy is provided. As part of the services provided by Spectrum.Life a Mental Health Promotion Manager is available to develop and deliver evidence based mental health and wellbeing initiatives to reduce stigma and improve mental health literacy and to increase engagement with the service. A series of weekly webinars and live talks to promote staff wellbeing in schools is current available on the wellbeing portal.