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# **COVID-19**

## Guidance for the Business and Retail Sector

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This guidance is suitable for use in the retail sector and is based on what is currently known about COVID-19.

## Key principles for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace

- Adherence to standard precautions with all individuals at all times
- Early identification of potential cases
- Promotion of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette
- Provision of up to date information about the virus (available from [the HSE](#))
- Avoiding exposures to respiratory secretions

These guidelines are not intended to cover every situation or event however the general principles contained within this document can be used as a framework to guide local preparations.

## Simple ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in your workplace

Employers and employees should keep up to date on the latest national public health advice from the [Department of Health](#) and [HSE](#).

The low-cost measures outlined below will help prevent the spread of COVID-19 contractors and employees.

Employers should start doing these things now, even if COVID-19 has not arrived in the area where they operate. By employing the steps below, they can already reduce working days lost due to illness and stop or slow the spread of COVID-19 should it arrive at their workplace.

## Signs and symptoms of COVID-19

The following symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection:

- cough
- difficulty in breathing
- fever

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

## How COVID-19 is spread

From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres or less) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Respiratory secretions produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes containing the virus are most likely to be the main means of transmission.

There are 2 main routes by which people can spread COVID-19:

- infection can be spread to people who are nearby (within 2 metres) or possibly could be inhaled into the lungs.
- it is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface, object or the hand of an infected person that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching door knob or shaking hands then touching own face)

There is currently little evidence that people who are without symptoms are infectious to others.

## What to do if an employee or a member of the public becomes unwell and believe they have been exposed to COVID-19

If the person has not been to specified areas in the last 14 days, then normal practice should continue.

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace and has travelled to areas where there is community transmission of COVID-19, the unwell person should be removed to an area which is at least 2 metres away from other people. If possible find a room or area where they can be isolated behind a closed door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window, do so for ventilation.

The individual who is unwell should call their doctor and explain which country they have returned from in the last 14 days and outline their current symptoms.

Whilst they wait for advice, they should remain at least 2 metres from other people. They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and be advised to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a bag or pocket then throw the tissue in the bin. If they don't have any tissues available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow.

If they need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, they should use a separate bathroom if available.

Closure of the workplace is not recommended.

The management team of the office or workplace will be contacted by the HSE to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken. A risk assessment of each setting will be undertaken by HSE with the lead responsible person. Advice on the management of staff and members of the public will be based on this assessment.

The HSE will also be in contact with the case directly to advise on isolation and identifying other contacts and will be in touch with any contacts of the case to provide them with appropriate advice.

Advice on cleaning of communal areas such as offices or toilets is outlined later in this document.

## When individuals in the workplace have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19

If a confirmed case is identified in your workplace, the local Health Protection Team will provide the relevant staff with advice. These staff include:

- any employee in close face-to-face or touching contact
- talking with or being coughed on for any length of time while the employee was symptomatic
- anyone who has cleaned up any bodily fluids
- close friendship groups or workgroups
- any employee living in the same household as a confirmed case

Contacts are not considered cases and if they are well they are very unlikely to have spread the infection to others:

- those who have had close contact will be asked to stay at home for 14 days from the last time they had contact with the confirmed case and follow the [home isolation information sheet](#).
- they will be actively followed up by the Health Protection Team
- if they develop new symptoms or their existing symptoms worsen within their 14-day observation period they should call their doctor for reassessment
- if they become unwell with cough and/or fever they will be tested for COVID-19
- if they are unwell at any time within their 14-day observation period and they test positive for COVID-19 they will become a confirmed case

**Staff who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case do not need to take any precautions and can continue to attend work.**

## Cleaning offices and public spaces where there are suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Coronavirus symptoms are similar to a flu-like illness and include cough, fever, or shortness of breath. Once symptomatic, all surfaces that the person has come into contact with must be cleaned including:

- all surfaces and objects which are visibly contaminated with body fluids
- all potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as toilets, door handles, telephones

Public areas where a symptomatic individual has passed through and spent minimal time in (such as corridors) but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids do not need to be specially cleaned and disinfected.

If a person becomes ill in a shared space, these should be cleaned using disposable cloths and household detergents, according to current recommended workplace legislation and practice.

### How long the virus can survive

How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors, for example:

- what surface the virus is on
- whether it is exposed to sunlight
- differences in temperature and humidity
- exposure to cleaning products

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 72 hours.

We know that similar viruses are transferred to and by people's hands. Therefore, regular hand hygiene and cleaning of frequently touched surfaces will help to reduce the risk of infection.

### Rubbish disposal, including tissues

All waste that has been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied. It should be put in a safe place and marked for storage until the result is available. If the individual tests negative, this can be put in the normal waste.

Should the individual test positive, you will be instructed what to do with the waste.

## Guidance on facemasks

Employees are not recommended to wear facemasks (also known as surgical masks or respirators) to protect against the virus. Facemasks are only recommended to be worn by symptomatic individuals (advised by a healthcare worker) to reduce the risk of transmitting the infection to other people.

Public Health advice recommends that the best way to reduce any risk of infection is good hygiene and avoiding direct or close contact (closer than 2 metres) with any potentially infected person.

Any member of staff who deals with members of the public from behind a full screen will be protected from droplet particles.

## Things to consider when you and your employees travel for work

### Before travelling

- Make sure your organisation and its employees have the [latest information on areas](#) where COVID-19 is spreading.
- Based on the latest information, your organisation should assess the benefits and risks related to upcoming travel plans.
- Avoid sending employees who may be at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. older employees and those with medical conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease) or who may live with someone who may be at higher risk of serious illness to areas where COVID-19 is spreading.
- Make sure all persons travelling to locations reporting COVID-19 are briefed by a qualified professional (e.g. staff health services or health care provider).
- Consider issuing employees who are about to travel with small bottles (under 100 CL) of alcohol-based hand rub. This can facilitate regular hand sanitisation.

### While travelling

- Encourage employees to wash their hands regularly and stay at least one metre away from people.
- Ensure employees know what to do and who to contact if they feel ill while travelling.
- Ensure that your employees comply with instructions from local authorities where they are

travelling. If, for example, they are told by local authorities not to go somewhere they should comply with this. Your employees should comply with any local restrictions on travel, movement or large gatherings.

### When you or your employees return from travelling

Employees who have returned from an area where COVID-19 is **spreading in the community** should monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days.

In addition, all individuals returning from the following areas\* should [self-quarantine](#) for 14 days.

\* China

Iran

Italy

Spain

South Korea (Daegu, Cheongdo or Gyeongsan)

If the person develops symptoms and/or cough they should contact their doctor by phone and explain their recent travel history and symptoms so they can help to arrange for testing for COVID-19

## Getting your business ready in case COVID-19 arrives in your community

1. Develop a plan of what to do if someone becomes ill with suspected COVID-19 at your workplace.
  - a. The plan should include putting the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others in the workplace and limiting the number of people who have contact with the sick person.
  - b. Contact the designated medical personnel for further advice
2. Consider how to identify persons who may be at risk, and support them, without inviting stigma and discrimination into your workplace. This could include persons who have recently travelled to an area reporting cases, or other personnel who have conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness (e.g. diabetes, heart and lung disease, older age).
3. Promote regular teleworking across your organisation where feasible. If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community the health authorities may advise people to avoid public transport and crowded places. Teleworking will help your business keep operating while your employees stay safe.

4. Develop a contingency and business continuity plan for an outbreak in the communities where your business operates
  - a. The plan will help prepare your organisation for the possibility of an outbreak of COVID-19 in your workplace or community.
  - b. The plan should address how to keep your business running even if a significant number of employees, contractors and suppliers cannot come to your place of business - either due to local restrictions on travel or because they are ill.
  - c. Communicate to your employees and contractors about the plan and make sure they are aware of what they need to do – or not do – under the plan. Emphasise key points such as the importance of staying away from work even if they have only mild symptoms or have had to take simple medications (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen) which may mask the symptoms.
5. Be sure your plan addresses the mental health and social consequences of a case of COVID-19 in the workplace or in the community and offer information and support.
6. For small and medium-sized businesses without in-house staff health and welfare support, develop partnerships and plans with your local health and social service providers in advance of any emergency.

### **Remember**

Now is the time to prepare for COVID-19. Simple precautions and planning can make a big difference. Action now will help protect your employees, your business and yourself.

## **How to stay informed**

Find the latest information on COVID-19:

[Department of Health](#)

[Health Service Executive](#)

[Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation](#)

[Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)

[Work Place Relations Commission](#)

[Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection Payments](#)

[WHO](#)