Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Coronavirus
COVID-19
National
Programme

COVID-19:
THE NEXT PHASE
How Ireland will live with the pandemic

September 2020

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to extraordinary demands on every one of us as individuals, as parents, as families, as workers and as business owners.

We have never had to deal with the demands and complexities which COVID-19 brings to even one area of our lives, not to mind all areas of our lives at the same time. The COVID-19 pandemic has been characterised by the European Centre for Disease Protection and Control as a “marathon and not a sprint”.

There is no real precedent on how to deal with a global pandemic of this nature and scale. Governments here and all over the world are making decisions based on the best information available at a given point in time. It is changing constantly.

The Framework for Restrictive Measures is a risk management strategy. It is designed to allow individuals, families, businesses and services better understand, anticipate and prepare for the measures Government might introduce to stop escalation of the transmission of the disease.

The situation in respect of the pandemic is highly unstable across the world. The situation in Ireland is showing concerning trends and it is against this backdrop that the Government is framing its approach to how we manage in the context of COVID-19 for the coming 6-9 months.

These are the complex choices which we have to make. There are very few certainties. This Government plan is aimed at bringing some clarity to help everyone to plan over the medium term.

Introduction

We have also learned a lot over the last six months and these learnings are informing our future approach.

- The power to control this pandemic is in our hands — individually and collectively
- People in Ireland are willing to follow public health advice to protect themselves and others
- Cooperation and solidarity across sectors and society is vital if this disease is to be contained
- No single preventive measure is adequate to control virus transmission — what matters is a combination
- There is an ongoing need to minimise the risk of cases/clusters and respond decisively when new threats/clusters emerge
- If the disease spreads in the community, it will have the greatest impact on the vulnerable
- Rapid identification and contact tracing of new cases is central to our response governments have combined their knowledge and resources to protect human life.

Overview | How Ireland will live with the pandemic

The roadmap for Living with COVID 19 has 3 broad strands:

1

Staying Healthy

2

Keeping Our Businesses Strong

3

Keeping Our Communities Resilient

Decision-Making Processes for Effective and Timely Delivery of Initiatives

Public Health Guidance
Personal Responsibility for 11 Actions

1 Wash our hands regularly and thoroughly

2 Wear face coverings on public transport, in shops and shopping centres and in all indoor settings where social distancing is difficult

3 Observe good cough and sneeze etiquette

4 Maintain social distancing

5 Exercise judgement about where we spend time

6 Be mindful as to whether guidance is being applied appropriately by business and service providers

7 Reduce social interactions

8 Work remotely where possible

9 Walk and cycle where possible to free up public transport for those who need it

10 Isolate immediately and contact your GP if you develop symptoms

11 Download the COVID tracker App

1. Staying Healthy as we live with COVID-19

Staying Safe:

1

Public Health Guidance must continue to be followed at an individual, community and business level

2

Rapid and Targeted Outbreak Management must be in place to mitigate transmission in places and among groups of highest risk

3

Monitoring and Enforcement of compliance must be supported

Monitoring and Enforcement

Voluntary compliance and personal responsibility have served our country well in the fight against the pandemic. To the greatest extent possible this approach will not change. However the complexities of certain sectors require stringent monitoring and enforcement.

The Health and Safety Authority will investigate and manage specific sectors when outbreaks occur.

A new Regulators Forum will bring all regulators together to coordinate compliance and enforcement and to determine what legislative and other measures are needed from time to time.

A review of the law is being undertaken to consolidate existing legal measures and identify enhancements required to support compliance and enforcement.

2. Staying Healthy as we live with COVID-19

Being Prepared and Responsive & Resuming Public Service Delivery:

1

New Approach to Reactive Measures

2

Health System Resilience and Responsive

Ensuring Public Services resumption is sustained and resilient to any future restrictions

3

Research & Innovation

International Travel

New Approach to Reactive Measures

The framework is incremental, stepwise approach and recognises the societal and economic impacts of the response to COVID-19.

Each level contains a "basket" of measures which are intended, collectively, to contribute to lowering risk of transmission in alignment with the risk level at that time.

New framework for Reactive Measures

Levels 1 to 5

Public Health Surveillance of criteria

Trigger points

The set of measures, individually, do not comprise a list of activities or places which are equally safe. Instead, they are "baskets" of measures which

- Are informed by public health understanding of the disease
- Recognise we can and must prioritise some activities over others

Responding to local and regional infection outbreaks

A **Restrictive Measures Framework** has been developed, recognising the need for an incremental, stepwise approach which takes account of the societal and economic impacts of the response to infection outbreaks. These measured responses are aimed at ensuring that the impact of restrictive measures on the lives of our people will be kept to the minimum necessary.

The Restrictive Measures Framework has five levels:

High Level Alert

5	All gatherings prohibited (except small numbers at funerals and weddings) and general requirement to stay at home (exercise permitted within 5 km).
4	Reduce congregation further with only small outdoor gatherings permitted and all businesses/services closed other than those deemed essential, limiting travel to within a specified region and further restrictions on public transport usage.
3	Reduce congregation by further limiting gatherings, stopping sporting events and closing certain business and services, restricting movement and limiting public transport usage, increased working from home and potential limitations on travel.
2	Reduce congregation by limiting gatherings in a range of settings, including in private homes as well as indoor and outdoor gatherings.
1	Appropriate protective measures in place, gatherings permitted within prescribed capacity limits and a clear focus on individual and collective responsibility.

Low Level Alert

Risk Criteria

National Public Health Emergency Team will continue to monitor the risk level associated with COVID-19 based on a monitoring framework.

These criteria will be considered collectively, in context and along with WHO and ECDC guidance to guide recommendations.

Risk/Indicators	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*	*Level 4*	*Level 5*
		No stability and/or significant increasing trajectory since moving to current level			
Risk Level Description	**Medium: low incidence with isolated clusters, low community transmission, pandemic ongoing, in Ireland and globally**	**Greater: increased incidence with multiple clusters, increased community transmission, pandemic ongoing and escalating, in Ireland and globally. These three levels provide for a graduated response to increasing trajectories**			**Greatest: high or rapidly increasing incidence, widespread community transmission, pandemic ongoing and escalating rapidly, in Ireland and globally.**
Clusters/Outbreaks	Single or isolated with origins understood in the majority of cases	Multiple clusters with secondary spread			Multiple clusters with secondary and tertiary spread
14 Day Cumulative Incidence Rate and related indicators	Origins of clusters or outbreaks understood in majority of cases 14-day cumulative incidence and related indicators low and stable	Significant or increasing level of disease			High or rapidly increasing level of disease
Indicators of viral transmission (including the number of cases, positivity rate and reproduction number)	Number of cases, positivity rate and reproduction number suggest low community transmission.	Indicate community transmission no longer effectively suppressed			Indicate significant community transmission
Incidence of cases in residential healthcare settings	Stable or decreasing, indicating suppression of community transmission	Increasing			Rapidly increasing
Number of deaths	Stable or decreasing, indicating suppression of community transmission	Increasing			High and/or rapidly increasing
Admissions to hospital and critical care	Stable or decreasing, indicating suppression of community transmission	Admissions to hospital increasing Admissions to critical care increasing			Significant or rapid increase in admissions to hospital and critical care
Cases related to overseas travel	Disease remains uncontrolled overseas				
Capacity to undertake testing and contact tracing		Capacity constrained in the context of current demand			Capacity constrained in the context of current demand

Health System Resilience & Responsiveness / Resumption key services

Across all services, there is a need to develop plans for surge capacity through service review, enhancement of capacity where possible and development of contingency plans.

Health Service Responsiveness

- Public Health Workforce
- Testing and Tracing
- Vaccination
- Infection Control

Health Service Delivery

- Mitigating effects of winter
- Building capacity and new pathways of care
- Getting key services resumed safely

Other Public Services

- COVID-19 Response management
- Priorities for resumption & future contingency
- Services for those who are most vulnerable

2. Keeping Our Businesses Strong as we live with COVID-19

Without a functioning economy we cannot maintain delivery of public services or support businesses to keep people in employment. We need to keep our people in work and businesses operating, while living with the pandemic.

If it is necessary to introduce further restrictions on economic activity for public health reasons, careful consideration will be given to the impact of such restrictions on employment and livelihoods, and the appropriate mitigations or supports that may be necessary.

There are two broad strands to keeping our businesses strong: the Extended National Programme of Supports that has developed rapidly since the start of the pandemic, and a new emphasis on Local Activation of Business Supports.

Strand 1

Extended Business Supports – How businesses and Employees are supported

Strand 2

Local Activation of Business Supports – delivering supports locally

Strand 1: The Extended National Programme
How businesses and Employees are supported

There are six major channels for supporting businesses and their employees:

1.
The Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme providing a subsidy of up to €203 per week for eligible employers per employee will now be in place until 31 March 2021, so giving certainty to businesses and their employees.

2.
The Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) has been extended until April 2021 with support gradually being aligned with existing social welfare rates. The payment was to be closed to new entrants from 17 September 2020 but that date has now been moved out to end-2020.

3.
The emergency suspension of section 12 of the Redundancy Payments Act (which requires an employee to give notice of intention to claim redundancy payments) is being further suspended until end-November.

4.
The COVID Illness Benefit will remain now stay in place until end-March 2021.

5.
A wide range of loans, grants, vouchers and other support schemes to support businesses through the pandemic is in place, including: the Restart Grant; the €2bn Pandemic Stabilisation and Recovery Fund; the SBCI Working Capital Loan Scheme, and Future Growth Loan Scheme; COVID-19 Business Loans from Microfinance Ireland; Enterprise Ireland's Sustaining Enterprise Fund; supports to assist business to trade online; the warehousing of tax liabilities, and a 6 months commercial rates waiver from Local Authorities.

6.
The €7 billion Jobs Stimulus, made up of €4 billion in direct expenditure, €1 billion in taxation measures, and €2 billion in credit guarantees, provides certainty on supports for employers and workers into 2021. The Stimulus includes:

- Enhanced Restart Grant providing assistance for SMEs;
- €200 million investment in training, skills development and activation measures for those who have lost their jobs
- Stay and Spend Initiative, to assist the hospitality and tourism sector from October to April;
- 6-month reduction in the standard rate of VAT from 23% to 21%, effective from the beginning of September;
- Tourism Adaptation Fund; and
- Accelerated, jobs- focused, capital works programme worth €500m, with expenditure prioritised to take place this year.

In the event of new restrictions being introduced, additional targeted business support measures will be considered

Strand 2: Local Activation of Business Supports
Delivering supports locally

The pandemic has shown us that local action is highly effective both because it is driven by locally identified need and because it is delivered by people with a high level of commitment to their communities. The following additional locally generated initiatives will now be available to support our businesses.

The local authorities working with the LCDCs and PPNs will develop recovery initiatives including town centre / public realm alterations, incentive schemes and advisory assistance

Local Authorities will use all instruments and agencies available to them such as the LEOs, Tourism Officers, local economic development initiatives, town centre management groups, supported by the Departments of Housing and Local Government and Rural and Community Development and Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Government Departments, will work collaboratively with the City and County Managers to devise a process and timeline for local engagement and finalisation of local plans, drawing on and accelerating established processes for developing local economic and community plans (LECPs).

Work will explore and harness local enterprise structures and substantial business support resources to underpin and drive local community recovery plans and reviewing existing LECPs for opportunities to re-purpose resources in the new context COVID-19 presents.

3. Keeping our Communities Resilient as we live with COVID-19

Resilience comes from a confidence in our ability to support each other, to respond to the stresses and difficulties, and to keep a sense of connectedness and hope in our communities.

Maintaining our individual and collective resilience will be vital to getting us through the months ahead.

It is important to recognise that feelings of stress and worry are normal in the face of such challenges, but also to know that there are supports available within our own communities.

1

Locally Driven Wellbeing Initiatives

2

Measures to support Mental Health for everyone

3

Mental Wellbeing: Young People

Building on what we have & adding supports where needed

Longer-term resilience is best supported by communities, with the help of local and national government. The focus on supporting physical and mental wellbeing aligns closely with Sláintecare, with its emphasis on empowering people and communities to keep well.
The following initiatives will be implemented and delivered at local level, adapted to local circumstances and needs.

National Well-being Campaign

National & Local programme of events

Local communities working together to adapt to Covid-19 environment

Recognising role of volunteerism

Continue auxiliary supports are offered remotely to ensure access.

Additional integrated psycho-social solutions, to augment existing interventions provided to date.

Recognising the impact of restrictions on young people.

Responding to those issues across Government as well as through youth services

Decision-Making Processes for Effective and Timely Delivery of Initiatives

A robust and sustainable Roadmap for the next 9-12 months is the now in place. Ireland is moving from a short-term emergency response approach to a medium-term approach to managing risk and repairing the damage that COVID-19 has inflicted on society.

As well as a single clearly understood framework for restrictive measures as set out above, this approach requires consolidation and streamlining of decision-making processes. These are the main elements of that process

1

The National Public Health Emergency Team – NPHET – will continue to provide guidance, support and expert advice for the overall national response to the pandemic. It will meet weekly as heretofore to consider the most up to date national and international risk assessments and consider implications for the national response etc.

2

A COVID-19 Oversight Group chaired by the Secretary to the Government will meet weekly to provide advice to Government on the strategic economic and social policy responses to the management of the disease and to consider the NPHET advices.

3

The Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 chaired by the Taoiseach will continue to assess the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 and oversee the cross-Government response.

4

Senior officials' groupings from across government will be convened by the Department of the Taoiseach to drive implementation of plans and initiatives and to support preparations for the Cabinet Committee and the COVID-19 Oversight Group.

All of the foregoing initiatives and structures will be reviewed by end March 2021.

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Thank you.