
Daily briefing on the government's response to COVID-19 - Monday 20 April 2020

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Delivered by Elizabeth Canavan, Assistant Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach

Introduction and Up-to-date Public Health Advice

Good Morning.

As always, I cannot stress enough the vital public health advice, the most effective personal actions we can take to help slow the spread of COVID-19:

- wash hands regularly and thoroughly
- use good cough and sneeze etiquette
- observe social distancing measures

- stay at home

We have been making progress on slowing the spread of COVID-19, thanks to your efforts in staying at home and respecting the guidelines. As I have said before, I know this is difficult, I know we all want to resume our lives. I know there is a lot of speculation about easing restrictions, about what will happen after 5 May, and that is being worked on.

I want to stress though, that any next steps will depend on the situation with the virus in Ireland. It is vital that we continue to slow its spread, that we don't ease up on our efforts - it is absolutely essential we keep observing the 2 kilometres limit for exercise, the guidance around essential and non-essential work, around cocooning. In particular, if you are cocooning I know this can be very frustrating but I would encourage everyone to stick with these guidelines, these are in place for you and your community's protection.

We are hearing from An Garda Síochána that there is ongoing a very high level of compliance with current restrictions. An Garda Síochána have asked us to thank you on their behalf for your ongoing co-operation and to ask that you continue to comply with the guidance.

Continuation of Health Services

We would like to reiterate that GPs, pharmacists and hospital services are all still operating care and assessment for non-COVID-19 health problems.

While we have had to make changes within some hospital services to adapt to COVID-19, and postpone some services, the health service is here to respond to emergencies or urgent health needs.

Our Emergency Departments are open 24/7 for people who are seriously ill or injured and if their life is at risk. It's very important to remember that stroke and heart attacks are life-threatening medical emergencies. If you or someone else is showing signs of a stroke or heart attack, don't wait, call 999.

Many people receive healthcare in their homes and we want this to continue.

If you have a home help service or a visit from the public health nurse planned it is important that you continue to have those visits. Our staff are trained and taking the precautions needed to protect their patients and themselves from COVID-19.

Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme

The [Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme](#) has been a landmark intervention introduced to support business and employees at this time of national emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

46,000 employers are registered with [Revenue](#) for the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme.

Today (20 April), Revenue has generated further payments to employers under the scheme of €21.3 million.

These payments will be in the bank accounts of the majority of the respective employers tomorrow (21 April).

The cumulative value of payments made under the scheme is now €321 million.

Zero Rate of VAT – Personal Protective Equipment

Revenue have confirmed that the zero rate of VAT may be applied, on a concessional basis, to the supply of personal protection equipment (PPE) and medical equipment to the HSE, hospitals, nursing homes, care homes and GP practices for use in the treatment of patients with COVID-19. This applies where such items have been acquired either domestically or intra – EU.

Items in question include:

- personal protection equipment (PPE)
- thermometers
- hand sanitiser

- medical ventilators and specialist respiratory equipment such as respirators for intensive and sub-intensive care and other oxygen therapy apparatus including oxygen tents
- oxygen

This concessional treatment will apply from 9 April 2020 up to 31 July 2020, subject to review. Further information can be found on [Revenue's website](#).

Employees

Today, the weekly payment of €350 under the COVID-19 [Pandemic Unemployment Payment Scheme](#) will be processed for approximately 584,000 people.

These payments will be lodged into their nominated bank account or post office tomorrow, 21 April.

There are still a small number of people who entered an incorrect PPS Number or IBAN number and the [Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection](#) are contacting these people to obtain the correct information so that the payment can be made.

The number of applications submitted online through www.mywelfare.ie is increasing and this is the easiest and most efficient way of submitting an application.

There is also an online facility to close a claim, for example, where an employer has claimed the [Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme](#) or where a claim was made inadvertently.

Community Fora

We want to take the time to remind anyone who needs support at this time that the Community Call Fora, run by the Local Authorities around the country can provide a much-needed lifeline. The fora are continuing to provide help to people around the country.

Yesterday, they received 355 calls nationally. They made 106 follow-up calls to people who have contacted them. Nationally, since 31 March, the Community Call Fora have received 17,419 calls and have made 8,383 follow-up calls.

You can find your local helpline number [here](#). If you need help, if you know someone who needs help, or if you want to volunteer to give help please contact your local forum.

If someone needs information, reassurance, or just to talk they can call [ALONE's](#) national phone line on 0818 222 0245.

Remember, ALONE is there for anyone experiencing difficulties with physical and mental health, finance, loneliness and other challenges.

Transport – Road Safety Authority - New Regulations – Point of Clarification

As previously noted, driver licenses and learner permits due to expire before 30 June 2020 will now be valid for a further four months. To clarify this, if your Driver Licence, Learner Permit or certificates of competency was due to expire within the timeframe between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2020, under the new regulations, add four months onto the end of the expiry date.

For example: If your driving licence is due to expire on 3 May 2020 – it's now valid until 3 September 2020 under the new regulations.

Where a vehicle's NCT due date was on or after 28 March, that test date has been extended by 4 months. For commercial vehicles due a Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test (CVRT) on or after 28 March, that test date has been extended by 3 months.

This will ensure that people will not lose out due to the temporary closure of Road Safety Authority facilities, and will in particular help to keep vital health and supply chain workers on our roads.

Donation Claims

The [Competition and Consumer Protection Commission](#) (CCPC) is advising consumers to be cautious of 'donation claims' made by traders when shopping for personal protective products online, such as face masks and hand sanitiser.

Some online traders appear to be informing consumers that personal protective products they are selling have been donated to hospitals and other healthcare providers. In many cases, it is unclear as to whether or not these donated protective products are suitable for use in healthcare settings and should not be considered as an indication of suitability or standards.

If a consumer is considering buying hand sanitising products and they are concerned, they can check the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine's [Register for Biocidal Products](#). Only notified and authorised products listed on the department's register are legal for sale and use in Ireland.

Any consumer that encounters misleading practices or experiences difficulties with a trader should contact the CCPC by visiting ccpc.ie so that they can advise them of their rights.

For further details, please see [here](#).

Registering Birth of Children Online

A small note for new and expecting parents to let them know that in order to facilitate social distancing it will now be possible to register the birth of a child electronically meaning there will no longer be a need to attend to register in person.

Registration is a legal requirement but you also need a birth certificate to enrol your child in school, to apply for a passport and lots of other purposes.

Electronic registration of a birth will also allow for Child Benefit Payments to begin without delay. This electronic registration option is available on www.gov.ie/deasp in the Social Welfare schemes and services [link](#).

One Parent Family payment

We are aware that there may be situations where a One Parent Family recipient is no longer receiving maintenance for their child because the other parent has lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In these cases, the department advises that the One Parent Family recipient should contact their local Intreo Centre and provide it with a letter (from the

recipient) stating that they are no longer receiving the maintenance payment from the other parent.

The department will then revise their One Parent Family payment on that basis for a period of 12 weeks. After that period their means may be re-assessed stage following a review.

As the family courts are not hearing maintenance cases during the pandemic, this situation is being carefully monitored on an ongoing basis, to ensure that these lone parents do not have to face any further difficulties or hardship at this time.

Media Reports on Cahersiveen Accommodation Centre

I understand there may be concerns circulating today in response to some media reports in relation to the accommodation centre for asylum seekers in Cahersiveen. It's important to note that the health authorities will only comment on any confirmed cases or outbreaks, of COVID-19 or any other disease, if there is a public health reason to do so.

We cannot give information about individuals or locations but we can reassure everyone that a rigorous response to COVID-19 has been put in place across all emergency accommodation centres for direct provision. We are closely following public health advice from the HSE and the National Public Health Emergency Team at all times.

In the event that a person is suspected of or confirmed as having COVID-19, where advised by HSE Public Health, they are moved to a dedicated offsite self-isolation facility. There they will be cared for by a healthcare team, until the HSE considers that they can return to their centre with no risk to other residents or staff.

Since 31 March, 850 new beds have been secured to:

- support vulnerable residents
- provide offsite accommodation for self-isolation
- help social distancing measures by reducing overall numbers in some existing centres

Hardware stores

I want to clear up some confusion which has arisen in recent days in relation to the status of hardware stores under current restrictions. Hardware stores shouldn't be open to the general public. Such outlets are not to open except on the emergency or delivery basis as set out in the updated retail services list, published [here](#). That list is unchanged.