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# Daily briefing on the government's response to COVID-19 - Monday 6 April 2020

Published: 6 April 2020

From: [Department of the Taoiseach](#)

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

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## Introduction and up-to-date Public Health Guidance

Good Morning Everyone.

As usual, I'm going to begin this morning with the most important, most effective measures you can take, to slow the spread of this virus. You all know at this stage that we have been asked to stay at home unless we need to go about essential business. For others, those aged over 70, or with an underlying medical condition, this request goes further. You have been asked to stay at home and to cocoon yourself for your own safety.

We know that it's very frustrating for those of you who are fit and well, and have your own routine, which involves getting out of the house.

We know that for some people, it doesn't feel right to ask for help that you don't normally need. For many people, it's just hard to ask for help.

The reason the Chief Medical Officer has asked you to stay home is to be confident that everyone over 70 and people with an underlying condition have the best chance of avoiding COVID-19. It's one less person to worry about contracting the disease.

The best way to think about it is that we need your help. And staying at home is how you can help.

For everyone else, we still need you to:

- wash your hands regularly and thoroughly
- use good cough and sneeze etiquette
- observe social distancing measures
- remember that you are part of the frontline

We heard the doctors telling us at the weekend that the next 7 days are critical. So far, so good, but we need to stick to the restrictions.

Everyone has their part to play and you have been playing your part.

That's why it has been effective so far. But we need to keep this going, to flatten the curve more than we have.

Finally, keeping our physical distance doesn't mean we shouldn't keep in touch. Remember to stay connected with friends, family and neighbours at this time.

And if you need help, or know someone who needs help or a listening ear, please call the [ALONE](#) helpline 0818 222 024 or your local authority helpline where you can get help with practical daily needs.

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## **Business Supports**

The [Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme](#) introduced by Government is continuing to have strong uptake.

39,000 employers are now registered with Revenue for the scheme.

Today (6 April), Revenue has generated further refunds under the scheme worth €14 million. These payments will be in the bank accounts of the majority of the respective employers tomorrow (7 April).

The cumulative value of payments made under the scheme is almost €87 million.

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## **Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation - Business Support Call Centre**

As you know, a Business Support Call Centre opened on 13 March. So far, 1,500 queries have been received by phone and email.

The number of queries peaked on Monday 30 March with over 100 queries that day. It has since moderated to a daily average of 55 over the remaining days.

Calls received last week are broken down as follows:

- 33% relating to essential services including retail and online trading
- 26% relating to income supports
- 21% relating to business and financial supports

The Business Support Call Centre line is 01 631 2002.

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## **Employees**

The weekly €350 payment run of the [COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment](#) issued from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection over the weekend and it will be available to customers from tomorrow 7 April.

Customers should check their bank account tomorrow or their post office, if this is their method of payment. The helpline for any enquiries is 1890 800 024.

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## Essential Workers

We all know that everyone working in the health service, both public and private, have a critical role to play in our management of this disease.

However, we also recognise the many, many other workers who are also vital in keeping food on our tables, medicines and medical equipment in pharmacies and shops. Those ensuring our critical infrastructure is safe – electricity, gas, water, waste, transport and information and communication technology and repair and maintenance and other critical construction projects. Those working to keep our supply chains open and those within those supply chains from farmers and the agriculture sector, to ferry staff, hauliers, drivers and delivery people, essential retail workers, those in manufacturing and distribution of essential goods. Those keeping our banks, credit unions and post offices open. The people behind the scenes keeping all those people paid, keeping work places clean, getting essential workers to work and ensuring that social welfare and other payments are made to keep the country moving within the restrictions.

And a thank you also to all the workers who have been redeployed from their usual jobs to pitch in where essential services need their support.

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## Community Call recap

A reminder to those who need help with practical supports like food, fuel or medicines delivered to your home, you can call your local authority helpline or email. These contact details are [here](#). Alternatively, you can call the ALONE helpline who can put your call through.

I also want to tell you about how An Post is supporting and contributing to the Community Call.

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## **An Post**

An Post is rolling out two new services to support communities during the current COVID-19 crisis.

‘Request a Check-In’ is a facility for family members to request a specific ‘An Post Check-In’ by the local postman or postwoman for an older or vulnerable person during the current ‘Cocooning’ period.

You can register for the free ‘Request a Check-In’ service by completing the postal address and Eircode of the customer at [anpost.com/Community-Support](https://anpost.com/Community-Support).

These details will be sent to the customer’s local postperson who will call to the address. If that person has any specific needs for groceries or a prescription, the postperson will provide them with details of ALONE, the national charity ensuring personal support to older and vulnerable people during the current crisis, or where necessary, will contact ALONE on their behalf.

Also launching today is An Post’s Newspaper Delivery service which will provide same-day delivery to households nationwide Monday to Friday.

You can find out more about ordering your chosen newspaper through [anpost.com](https://anpost.com) or by contacting their chosen national or local newspaper directly by phone.

Once you have signed up and arranged payment for their preferred publication, An Post will provide a same-day delivery service for the newspapers. Deliveries will be free of charge for older and vulnerable customers currently ‘cocooning’ during the COVID-19 crisis.

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## **Justice – Direct Provision**

We are aware that there are some concerns around the impact of COVID-19 in Direct Provision centres. Intensive work has been underway in the Department of Justice since the emergence of the COVID-19 crisis to ensure that to the best of their ability, they protect the health and welfare of asylum seekers and refugees availing of their accommodation services.

They are guided in that by the HSE and the National Public Health Emergency Team.

Since the crisis emerged, contingency planning has been underway across Direct Provision centres. Centres have been requested to generate on-site self-isolation capacity and as a further protection for residents, all centres have been temporarily closed to visitors. Last week, we announced that 650 new temporary hotel beds have been procured following intensive negotiations by the Department of Justice within a very short space of time.

The 650 new temporary beds are being used in a number of ways, including to:

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

This increase in capacity is a critical part of their overall strategy to protect our residents. Further offsite self-isolation facilities are being examined on a regional basis.

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## **Access Arrangements**

We would like to reiterate what Minister Flanagan said over the weekend in relation to access arrangements in family law cases.

We appreciate the concerns that the public health emergency is causing for many families in relation to court orders for matters such as access, maintenance and guardianship.

However, court orders in relation to access remain in place. The restrictions brought in to tackle COVID-19 do not stop them being implemented.

It has also been clarified that parents can come to mutually agreed arrangements for alternative contact, which could involve phone calls, Skype or other methods. It's important that parents communicate about agreements made for the COVID-19 period by text or email.

Mediation services are still available and should be used if you are having trouble coming to an agreed arrangement.

And of course, everyone should remember, at all times, that the welfare of the child is paramount.

The Family Mediation Service of the Legal Aid Board is offering free telephone mediation and conflict coaching. More details about this service can be found at [legalaidboard.ie](http://legalaidboard.ie).

Other free parent support services which provide help and advice are available from [onefamily.ie](http://onefamily.ie) and [treoir.ie](http://treoir.ie).

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## India repatriation flight

Over 70 Irish citizens departed India safely on 4 April on a flight organised by our Embassy in New Delhi and Consulate General in Mumbai.

As part of our shared global commitment to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, the flight also carried over 100 citizens from a number of EU member states, the UK and Brazil.

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## Current situation

To date, the government has assisted over 2,700 Irish citizens in returning home to Ireland since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently we are trying to help a further 2,000 of our citizens to return home. Many are small groups but the majority at the moment are in Australia with a couple of hundred in New Zealand.

Citizens should contact the nearest Embassy or Consulate to update them on their situation and they should closely follow information provided on the Embassy Twitter account. They are providing as much factual and practical information as possible.

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## **Nursing Homes**

Last week the National Public Health Emergency Team recommended additional measures to further support nursing home residents and staff. These recommendations arise from the identification of clusters of COVID-19 cases within a number of nursing homes.

The Health Service Executive will be working closely with the sector to support a range of additional measures to reduce the risk of transmission within nursing homes:

- importantly each nursing home will be identifying a COVID-19 lead
- HSE will provide access to Personal Protective Equipment, expert advice and training
- staff movement across residential facilities will be minimised and the HSE will support staff with alternative accommodation and transport, if required
- staff screening will start in nursing homes twice a day, COVID-19 testing will be prioritised for staff

In addition to these measures, a temporary COVID-19 Financial Support Scheme is being introduced by Government and will be established in the coming days, to support the critical services provided by nursing homes.

The Scheme will provide a temporary assistance payment to support private and voluntary nursing homes in managing any outbreak that occurs. It will be reviewed after the first month's operation.

Thank you.