

COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 - The Path Ahead

From [Department of the Taoiseach](#)

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Your guide to the upcoming changes

Schools and childcare

- 1 March** Special schools at 100% capacity
Junior and senior infants, 1st and 2nd class to return to school
Final year Leaving Certificate classes to return to school
- 8 March** Resumption of the ECCE programme and return to school of ECCE-age children
- 15 March** 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class at primary level
5th year post-primary students to return to school
- 29 March** Early learning and care, and school-age childcare services to reopen
- 12 April** 1st to 4th years post-primary return to school

Economic measures

Pandemic Unemployment Payment	Extended to 30 June 2021
Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme	Extended to 30 June 2021
COVID-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit	Extended to 30 June 2021
Covid Restrictions Support Scheme	Extended to 30 June 2021
Suspension of redundancy provisions	Extended to 30 June 2021
Commercial rates waiver	Extended to 30 June 2021

How we can stay on track

Managing new variants	New variants will be monitored carefully as schools and childcare reopen
Controlling the virus	Bringing the virus numbers down will give us more options
Securing vaccine supply	We are working with the EU to secure Ireland's vaccine supply
Decreasing hospitalisations	We must reduce the pressure on our health system and frontline workers

The government has today decided to facilitate the safe return of in-school education and childcare services on a cautious and phased basis during March and April.

This will be alongside the scaling up of the vaccination programme in line with supply, ensuring that all vaccine doses are administered to target groups as soon as possible.

The current public health restrictions will remain in place until 5 April 2021, when a further review will be conducted.

Measures to support business and those unable to work due to the pandemic will be extended further.

The impact of these restrictions on the economic, physical and mental well-being of our communities is considerable. An additional €10 million in funding will be made available to meet the increase for mental health services, and a further top-up of €10 million will be made available to enable critical services to continue being delivered to vulnerable groups.

The revised plan for managing the virus – COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021: The Path Ahead – sets out how in-school education and childcare services will be reinstated in a phased manner from 1 March, with staggered return throughout March to be concluded after the Easter break on 12 April (Details below).

The decision to extend Level 5 restrictions is difficult and will have considerable impact on all parts of our economy and society. However, we continue to have an unacceptably high level of disease in the community, so we must continue to suppress the disease. The higher transmissibility of new variants requires all other restrictions to remain in place while these initial services reopen.

This cautious, measured approach is being taken in order to:

- make steady progress, starting with childcare and schools, while avoiding a further wave of disease and re-imposition of restrictions
- protect the most vulnerable by an efficient rollout of the vaccination programme
- remain vigilant and agile regarding the uncertainties in the face of new variants and to capitalise on emerging evidence on available vaccines
- lay the foundations for the full recovery of social life, public services and the economy

If the transmission of the virus reaches acceptable levels, the vaccination programme progresses as planned and public health advice allows, further options that will be considered from 5 April are:

- some easing of restrictions on outdoor activities and meetings beyond 1 other household
- consideration of extending the current 5km limit
- staggered start of easing of other areas of restriction with a focus on outdoor activities including sport and some areas of construction

Any further easing of restrictions after 5 April will need a further three to four week period to allow for assessment of the impact of changes.

The requirement to work from home will continue throughout this period, unless work is an essential health, social care or other essential service or activity that cannot be done from home.

The government's community support and well-being programmes will continue and employment and business supports will be extended, many of them to June.

The government is committed to developing a clear roadmap for a return of activities in the hardest hit sectors including tourism, culture and sport.

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Recovery and Renewal 2021 - The Path Ahead

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Notes

Phased Return to In-School Education

The phased return of in-school education and childcare services will be implemented as follows:

1 March 2021:

- special schools to resume at 100% capacity
- the first four classes at primary level, that is, Junior and Senior infants, First and Second class to return to in-school education
- final year Leaving Certificate classes to return to in-school education

8 March 2021:

- resumption of the ECCE Programme and return of ECCE-age children

15 March 2021:

- targeted return of 3rd; 4th; 5th and 6th class at primary level. 5th years at post-primary level

29 March 2021:

- resumption of all other early learning and childcare services

12 April 2021 onwards (post Easter Holidays):

- reopening for 1st to 4th years at post-primary

Early years and school-aged childcare

The staggered resumption of early learning and childcare services will take place over the following phases:

- resumption of the ECCE programme and return of ECCE-age children from 8 March
- resumption of all other early learning and childcare services from 29 March
- the resumption of the ECCE programme from 8 March broadly aligns with the resumption of onsite primary schooling. It is also in line with expectation among providers and offers sufficient time for providers to prepare to reopen

Economic measures

Over the coming period, the government will continue to support workers by:

- extending the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme, currently scheduled to close on 31 March 2021, to 30 June 2021
- extending the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, currently scheduled to close on 31 March 2021, to 30 June 2021 for current recipients, and continue to allow new entrants to join the Payment
- extending the COVID-19 enhanced illness benefit, currently scheduled to end on 31 March 2021, to 30 June 2021

In addition, the government will continue to support business by:

- extending the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme, scheduled to close on 31 March 2021, to 30 June 2021 and will conduct an economic assessment of the scheme in line with the statutory requirements on the impact, design and sustainability of this important support
- continuing to provide significant supports, through loans, grants, vouchers and support schemes to business affected by the pandemic, and to keep such supports under review as the situation develops
- extending the suspension of redundancy provisions, currently in place to 31 March 2021, to 30 June 2021, in order to help avoid further permanent job losses at a time when approximately 480,000 people are in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment
- extending the current commercial rates waiver for a further three months for those businesses most seriously affected by the restrictions

Local Communities and Local Delivery

- a further Stability Fund for Community and Voluntary Organisations top-up of €10 million will be made available to enable continuity of critical service delivery to vulnerable groups

Wellbeing and Mental Health

- auxiliary mental health supports will continue to be offered remotely to ensure those in isolation can access assistance when needed. An additional €10 million in funding will be made available to meet the increase in demand being experienced