

Stay safe together while staying two metres apart

Dr Shane Farrelly MFOM Occupational Health Specialist

COVID-19: Guidance for First Aiders

1. Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for first aiders and others who may have close contact with individuals with potential coronavirus infection (COVID-19). This protocol should be followed by whoever provides immediate assistance requiring close contact until further medical assistance arrives.

In the current situation of sustained community transmission of COVID-19 in Ireland, social distancing, the strict application of safe working practices and, where social distancing cannot be maintained, the use of PPE are recommended to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

2. COVID-19

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. Typical symptoms of coronavirus infection include fever and continuous cough; in some people, the illness may progress to severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

Generally, coronavirus 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.

COVID-19 is a new disease caused by a recently discovered virus, first identified in China. Transmission of COVID-19 is now widespread worldwide.

3. 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 (droplets) containing the virus are likely to be the most important means of transmission; these are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

There are 2 common routes people could become infected:

1. Secretions can be directly transferred into the mouths or noses of people who are nearby (within 2 metres) or possibly could be inhaled into the lungs.
2. It is possible that someone may become infected by touching a person, a surface or object that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as shaking hands or touching door knobs then touching own face).

4. Who may be suspected of having COVID-19?

As there is currently sustained community transmission of COVID-19 throughout Ireland, there is an increased likelihood of any individual in the community having the infection.

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This guidance is for all situations where close contact (defined as being within 2 metres of an individual) is required during first responder duties.

5. Safe working systems

Where possible, all contact with members of the public should be carried out while maintaining social distancing measures – a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet). Where this is not possible, the principles for the [Hierarchy of Risk](#) should be applied, using measures such as physical barriers and alternative working practices and, as a final measure, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) based on risk assessment, where other safe working systems alone may not be feasible or may be insufficient to mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

6. Hygiene measures

The best way to protect yourself and others is through rigorous cleaning, personal hygiene and regular hand hygiene. An increased frequency of cleaning and disinfection of all surfaces and equipment, using standard household cleaning and disinfection products, is recommended.

After contact with any member of the public, clean your hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser at the earliest opportunity. This advice is applicable to all situations, regardless of whether there was close contact or the minimum 2 metre social distancing was maintained.

Avoid touching your mouth, eyes and nose.

There are no additional precautions to be taken in relation to cleaning your clothing or uniform other than what is usual practice.

7. What to do if you are required to come into close contact with someone as part of your first responder duties

7.1 Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Where it is not possible to maintain a 2 metre or more distance away from an individual, disposable gloves and a disposable plastic apron are recommended. Disposable gloves should be worn if physical contact is likely to be made with potentially contaminated areas or items.

The use of a fluid repellent surgical face mask is recommended and additional use of disposable eye protection (such as face visor or goggles) should be risk assessed when there is an anticipated risk of contamination with splashes, droplets of blood or body fluids.

When using a fluid repellent surgical face mask, you should mould the metal strap of the mask over the bridge of the nose and make sure the mask fits snugly under the chin, around or across any facial hair if present.

Clean your hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol sanitiser before putting on and after taking off PPE. In all circumstances where some form of PPE is used, the safe removal of the PPE is a critical consideration to avoid self-contamination. [Guidance on putting on and taking off PPE is available](#). Dispose of all PPE according to the instructions and training provided by your company.

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7.2 Cardiopulmonary resuscitation

If you are required to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), you should conduct a risk assessment and adopt appropriate precautions for infection control.

In adults, it is recommended that you do not perform rescue breaths or mouth-to-mouth ventilation; perform chest compressions only. Compression-only CPR may be as effective as combined ventilation and compression in the first few minutes after non-asphyxial arrest (cardiac arrest not due to lack of oxygen).

If a decision is made to perform mouth-to-mouth ventilation in asphyxial arrest, use a resuscitation face shield where available.

Should you have given mouth-to-mouth ventilation there are no additional actions to be taken other than to monitor yourself for symptoms of possible COVID-19 over the following 14 days. Should you develop such symptoms you should contact your GP and inform Health & Safety who will arrange follow up your Senior Medical Advisor.

7.3 Providing assistance to unwell individuals

If you need to provide assistance to an individual who is symptomatic and may have COVID-19 (that is any individual with a new, continuous cough and/or high temperature), wherever possible, place the person in a place away from others, in the designated room. Ask others who are not involved in providing assistance to stay at least 2 metres away from the individual.

7.4 Cleaning the area where assistance was provided

Cleaning will depend on where assistance was provided. It should follow the advice for cleaning in [non-healthcare settings](#). 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 can be cleaned in the usual way. However, all surfaces that a symptomatic individual has come into contact with must be cleaned and disinfected.

7.5 If there has been a blood or body-fluid spill

Keep people away from the area. Use a spill-kit if available, using the PPE in the kit or PPE you have been provided with by KBC and following the instructions provided with the spill-kit. If no spill-kit is available, place paper towels/roll onto the spill, and seek further advice from emergency services when they arrive.

7.6 Contacts of the person you have assisted

Advise anyone who had close contact with the individual that if they go on to develop symptoms of COVID-19 (continuous cough, fever), they should contact their GP and notify their line manager who will arrange additional support from your Senior Medical Advisor.

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8. What to do if you become unwell

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, however mild, you will need to stay at home for 14 days and self-isolate.

Contact your GP and Health & Safety who will arrange for your Senior Medical Advisor to contact you.

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