Most of the information previously included in the FAQs is now available via the Health Service Executive (HSE) and Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) websites. Information for the general public is available via the HSE website and information and guidance for healthcare providers is available via the HPSC website. Updates and further information are also available via the Government of Ireland website.

As such, these FAQs have been significantly shortened and are now intended to cover additional information not readily available via the HSE or HPSC websites.

COVID-19 is a new disease in the human population and the national and international situation in relation to COVID-19 is dynamic and evolving. FAQs reflect the information available at the time of writing and will be updated on an ongoing basis.


General Information

1. **What is a Coronavirus?**
   Coronavirus are a large family of viruses that circulate among animals including camels, cats and bats. Coronavirus are zoonotic, meaning that they can be transmitted (spread) from animals to humans. Coronavirus cause illness in humans ranging from the common cold to more severe respiratory (lung) diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The SARS Coronavirus (SARS-CoV) was first identified in China in 2003 and scientists suspect that the virus spreads to humans from civets. The MERS Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) was identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012 and the virus spreads to humans from dromedary camels.

   More information on coronaviruses can be found on the ECDC factsheet.

2. **What is the 2019 novel Coronavirus?**
   A novel (new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. This virus is called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and the disease that it causes is called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The first cases of COVID-19 were identified in people working in a seafood and live animal market in Wuhan. It is thought that humans picked up the virus from animals at the market.

3. **Is COVID-19 similar to SARS or the seasonal influenza virus (the flu)?**
   The virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) belongs to the same family of viruses (coronaviruses) as the virus that causes SARS, but it is not the same virus.
The virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is not from the same family of viruses as the seasonal influenza virus (‘the flu’). COVID-19 and the flu are completely different diseases, but can cause similar symptoms such as fever or cough. Because the symptoms of COVID-19 and the flu can be very similar, it can be difficult to identify COVID-19 based on symptoms alone. That’s why laboratory tests may be needed to determine whether someone has COVID-19 or a different illness such as the flu.

4. **Am I protected against COVID-19 if I had the influenza (flu) vaccine this year?**
   No. Influenza and COVID-19 are two different diseases caused by different viruses and the seasonal influenza vaccine does not protect against COVID-19.

5. **How does COVID-19 spread?**
   The virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) can spread from person to person through respiratory droplets - small droplets from the nose or mouth of a person infected with the virus. These droplets are produced when a person coughs, sneezes or exhales. People can catch the virus either:
   
   - directly, by breathing in the droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes or
   - indirectly, by touching surfaces (e.g. table, door handle) that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. It is still not known how long the virus survives on surfaces, although current information suggests the virus may survive for 48-72 hours. Simple household disinfectants can kill the virus. Surfaces should be cleaned first and then disinfected.

   Current information suggests that COVID-19 spreads easily from person to person. While people are most likely to pass on the infection when they have symptoms, current information suggests that people may be able to spread the virus to others even if they themselves do not have any symptoms.

   One of the best ways to prevent person to person spread of infectious disease, including COVID-19, is to use proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

6. **Can the virus that causes COVID-19 be spread through the air?**
   Current information suggests that the virus that causes COVID-19 is spread through contact with respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or exhales. These droplets are too heavy to hang in the air. They quickly fall on floors or surfaces. You can be infected by breathing in the virus if you are within 1 meter of a person who has COVID-19, or by touching a contaminated surface and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands.

7. **Can I catch COVID-19 from the faeces of someone with the disease?**
   The risk of catching COVID-19 from the faeces of an infected person appears to be very low. Current information suggest that the virus may be present in the faeces of an infected person, but person to person spread through this route is not a common feature of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, research is ongoing into the ways in which COVID-19 is spread. It is always
important to use good hand hygiene, including hand washing after using the bathroom and before eating.

8. Can COVID-19 be spread to other people by someone who has no symptoms?
Current information suggests that COVID-19 spreads easily from person to person. While people are most likely to pass on the infection when they have symptoms, current information suggests that people may be able to spread the virus to others even if they themselves do not have any symptoms.

One of the best ways to prevent person to person spread of infectious disease, including COVID-19, is to use proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

9. What is the incubation period for COVID-19?
The incubation period is the time between infection and the onset of symptoms of disease (e.g. cough, fever, shortness of breath). Current information suggests that the incubation period for COVID-19 may range from 2-11 days. This estimate will be refined as more information about the disease becomes available. Based on information from other coronavirus diseases, such as MERS and SARS, the incubation period for COVID-19 could be up to 14 days.

10. How long will the COVID-19 pandemic last?
Unfortunately, it is not possible to predict how long the pandemic will last. We are dealing with a new virus and therefore a lot of uncertainty remains. For instance, it is not known whether transmission within the EU/EEA will naturally decrease during the northern hemisphere summer, as is observed for seasonal influenza.

COVID-19 and animals and food products

11. Can I catch COVID-19 from my pet?
While there has been one instance of a dog being infected in Hong Kong, to date, there is no evidence that a dog, cat or any pet can transmit COVID-19. COVID-19 is mainly spread from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. To protect yourself, clean your hands frequently and thoroughly. People with pets and people who work with animals should engage in usual preventive actions to avoid infection like hand washing and respiratory hygiene.

12. What is the risk of COVID-19 infection from contact with pets and other animals in the EU?
Current research links COVID-19 to certain types of bat as the original source, but does not exclude the involvement of other animals. Several types of coronaviruses can infect animals and can be transmitted to other animals and people. There is no evidence that companion animals (e.g. dogs or cats) pose a risk of infection to humans. As a general precaution, it is always wise to observe basic principles of hygiene when in contact with animals.

13. What is the risk of COVID-19 infection from food products imported from affected areas?
There has been no report of transmission of COVID-19 via food and therefore there is no evidence that food items imported into the European Union in accordance with the applicable
animal and public health regulations pose a risk for the health of EU citizens in relation to COVID-19. The main mode of transmission is from person to person.

14. What is the risk of COVID-19 infection from animals or animal products imported from affected areas?
There is no evidence that any of the animals or animal products authorised for entry into the European Union pose a risk to the health of EU citizens as a result of the presence of COVID-19.

COVID-19 and packages/money

15. What is the risk of getting COVID-19 from packages delivered through the postal system?
A recent study published by The New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) reported that the virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is able to persist for up to 24 hours on cardboard, in experimental settings (e.g. controlled relative humidity and temperature). There is no evidence of the infection being transmitted through contaminated packages that have been exposed to different environmental conditions and temperatures.

16. Are people working in the supply chain including logistics, control services, retail, etc. at risk of getting COVID-19 by handling packages? What measures can be taken to reduce the risk of getting infected in this type of work setting?
People working in the supply chain, including logistics, control services, retail, etc. are not at greater risk to of getting COVID-19 as a result of managing packages. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) does not recommend any special measures at supply chain level over and above those addressed to the general public: frequent and thorough hand washing and use of alcohol-based hand disinfectants, keeping a distance from other employees, and not working if showing signs of respiratory symptoms.

17. Are couriers at risk of getting COVID-19 by handling packages? What measures can be taken to reduce the risk of getting infected in this type of work setting?
People working as couriers are not at greater risk of getting COVID-19 as a result of managing packages. Couriers delivering packages at homes are advised to keep a distance from the customer, use alcohol-based hand disinfectant frequently (and always before and after contact with a customer) and avoid working if showing signs of respiratory symptoms.

18. Is it safe to handle money that may have been handled by someone with COVID-19?
Theoretically, money may become contaminated with the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the same way as any surface/object that is coughed or sneezed on by a person infected with the virus. The best way to protect yourself is to use good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene. Wash your hands after handling money and use contactless payment methods whenever possible.
Guidance for Ireland is based on guidance from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organization, and has been developed by the National Public Health Outbreak Response Team. An Expert Advisory Group, which includes experts in Public Health Medicine, Infectious Diseases, Infection Prevention and Control and Virology has been established which provides expert scientific advice relating to novel coronavirus, including the review of current guidance.

Further information is available from
Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) webpage https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/
World Health Organization (WHO) webpage https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus

Last updated: 31st March 2020