

## COVID-19 Guidance for People at Risk of Severe Disease on Reducing Risk of COVID-19 Infection

### V1.2 01.03.2022 HSE Antimicrobial Resistance & Infection Control

Version	Date	Changes from previous version	Author
V1.3	01/03/2022	The order of the key points is changed and points are clarified Shortened by removing detail and duplication editorial changes Information on vaccination is updated Includes recommendations for medical grade or respirator mask use Reference to 5 level framework removed Information on new treatment for COVID-19 and contacting the doctor quickly if you may be eligible for treatment Appendix 1 and 2 replaced with links to websites Appendix 3 is now Appendix 1	AMRIC
V1.2	22/07/2022	Reference to the importance of vaccination and how it impacts of how you protect yourself Reference to adequate ventilation in indoor places	AMRIC
V1.1	06/04/2021	Includes information about vaccination including an explanation of what fully vaccinated means Vaccination may not have the same benefits for people who have problems with their immune system due to a medical condition or to a treatments for a medical condition Reference to opening a window or door when other people are present to improve ventilation	AMRIC
V1.0	11/10/2020	Initial guidance	AMRIC

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## Key Points

1. People at high risk for COVID-19 have the right to make their own decisions and the responsibility to look after their own health and the health of others. You can find information on the conditions that put someone at high risk at the following link <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/people-at-higher-risk/overview/>
2. It is good to keep active and look after your general health. A healthy way of life improves your chance of recovery if you get COVID-19.
3. Most people who were at high risk of severe COVID-19 who are up to date with vaccination (including any recommended booster vaccination) should follow the general public health guidance that applies to everyone and use their judgement about any extra care they want to take in particular with respect to avoiding crowded places.
4. People who are immunocompromised (weak immune system) should take extended primary vaccination (3 doses) and a booster (4<sup>th</sup> dose).
5. Even with extended primary vaccination and booster vaccination often does not work as well for people that are severely immunocompromised. Although vaccination reduces risk to some degree, people who are severely immunocompromised are often still at risk after four doses of vaccine.
6. People who are severely immunocompromised are advised to continue to take particular care even after extended primary vaccination and booster in particular with respect to avoiding crowded places.
7. People who are severely immunocompromised who develop symptoms of COVID-19 need to contact their doctor promptly. They may benefit from early treatment if COVID is detected and treated within 5 days of starting symptoms.
8. People who are 65 years or older and people aged 12 to 64 who have medical conditions that put them at high risk and who decided not to take the vaccine may benefit from early treatment if COVID is detected and treated within 5 days of starting symptoms. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to depend on early treatment.
9. Information on who may benefit from early treatment if they get COVID-19 is available at the following link; <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/symptoms/treatments-for-covid-19/#:~:text=A%20new%20medicine%20is%20available,this%20medicine%20is%20for%20you.>
10. The risk of contracting COVID-19 is generally much lower outdoors than indoors.
11. You can lower the risk of catching COVID-19 and other infections when in public places by

continuing to clean your hands, wearing a medical grade or respirator mask when indoors or on public transport and checking that there is adequate ventilation.

12. There is almost no chance of you catching COVID-19 at home if people who are infectious with COVID-19 do not come to your home.
13. It is usually not practical for people in a family household to avoid contact with each other at home. If everyone in the household is vaccinated (including booster) and careful when out of the house that helps to keep everyone safe.
14. If you can keep the number of people who come into your house to visit or to do work to the small number of trustworthy people then you can feel safe at home and you can relax there.
15. If you need healthcare workers to come to your home to help you care for yourself or someone else in the house you can expect them to follow all necessary precautions to reduce the risk of carrying infection to you. It is important that you continue to use the healthcare services you need. It is OK to ask or remind healthcare workers about precautions if they seem to forget.
16. Check that anyone who comes to the house to visit or to do work is well when they arrive (no symptoms of COVID-19). Ask them to clean their hands when they arrive, to wear a medical grade or respirator mask and to keep some distance from you whenever possible.
17. If anyone in the house gets symptoms of COVID-19 they should avoid keep to their own room and away from others in the house.
18. If anyone in the house is told they are a COVID-19 Contact they should follow the current public health advice, available at: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/guidanceforhealthcareworkers/publichealthguidance/Crib%20sheet.pdf> :
19. It is good for health and wellbeing to leave home to go for a walk or drive. It is safer if you can limit contact with people who are not in your own household.
20. It is good for health and wellbeing to meet socially with a small number of people you know and trust to take care not to put you at risk.
21. If you become unwell call your GP and if you have an appointment with your GP or at a hospital or clinic is it important to keep the appointment.
22. You are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 if you need to be or choose to be in a place where there are large numbers of people indoors.

23. The more infection there is in the community at a given time the greater the risk of exposure to COVID if you are out and about or have anyone visit or do work in your home.
24. If you want to tell people who provide services that you need to be extra careful to avoid COVID-19 they will usually try to fit you in at a quiet time and be extra careful when providing you with the service.
25. Talking on the phone or by video link is safe and is a good way to keep in touch and to get help if you need it. If you need help for any reason there are a number of places you can go for help including:
  - a) HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams (contact details for each region in Appendix 1).
  - b) SAGE (1850 71 94 00 from 8 in the morning until 10 at night) [www.sageadvocacy.ie](http://www.sageadvocacy.ie).
  - c) ALONE (0818 222 024 from 8 in the morning until 8 at night) [www.alone.ie](http://www.alone.ie).
  - d) The HSE confidential recipient at 1890 1000 14.
  - e) Alzheimer Society of Ireland 1800 341 341 ([www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie)).
  - f) If you need medical assistance call your GP or in an emergency call 112 or 999
  - g) Family Carers Ireland 1800 240724. (<https://www.familycarers.ie/media/1986/family-carers-ireland-emergency-plan.pdf>).

Information on getting your COVID-19 vaccine is available here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/>

## **Purpose**

This guide is written for people who are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 and for those who support them.

People at high risk of severe disease from COVID-19 have the right to make their own decisions and the responsibility to look after their own health and the health of others. This involves making choices about how they keep a balance between doing the things they need to do and want to do to maintain general health and wellbeing while keeping the risk of harm from COVID-19 as low as is practical. People at higher risk often need the help of family, friends and carers to support them. This support may be especially important now for those who do not get full benefit from vaccination such as those who are severely immunocompromised. It may be harder to stay safe now that most people are getting back to normal levels of social activity. There is hope that new medicines will help reduce the risk for people who are at high risk.

## **Introduction**

COVID-19 is caused by a virus. People almost always catch COVID-19 by sharing space indoors for 15 minutes or more with a person who is infectious. People are more likely to catch infection indoors or in another enclosed space like a car or a bus if that space is poorly ventilated. The risk of catching COVID-19 from touching things like groceries, newspapers or clothes delivered to your house is very low. There may be a very small chance that this could happen if the person who delivered them has COVID-19. Hand hygiene is the most practical way to manage that risk.

COVID-19 infection does not affect everyone the same way. Some people do not get sick at all (asymptomatic infection), some people get a very minor illness, some people get an illness like a really bad flu and a small number of people get a very serious illness that can mean they need to go to hospital. Some people who catch COVID-19 will die as a result. There is no way to tell any person for sure what will happen to them if they catch COVID-19. The best that we can do is to give some idea of what the chances are for groups of people of different ages and for people who already have long-term medical conditions. The risk of severe illness and death is generally much lower in people who have completed primary vaccination and who have had booster.

## **Vaccination**

Vaccination against COVID-19 is a very effective way of protecting most people against severe disease and death from COVID-19. Vaccine also helps to some degree to reduce the risk that someone can spread the infection to other people. If everyone you live with or meet regularly is up to date with their vaccination that can help to keep you safe.

Vaccines do not provide protection from the day you get your first dose. The protection builds up over time. For most people the primary course was two doses of vaccine but the primary course is three doses for people who are immunocompromised. Booster vaccination is key in maintaining the protection from your primary vaccination. The booster is the third dose for most people but a fourth dose for people who are immunocompromised.

When vaccinated you can expect to have a very high degree of protection from severe COVID-19 if your immune system is working well. If you are in doubt about your immune system function, speak to your doctor.

## **Making your home safe**

For this purpose, your home is your house or apartment and any indoor or outdoor space around it (a yard, garden or fields) that is used only by you and by others in your household.

There is almost no chance of you catching COVID-19 at home if people who are infectious with COVID-19 do not come to your home. Managing who comes into your home is the most important part of keeping your home a safe haven. If you can make your home safe then you have a place where you can relax and move about freely without worrying all the time about the risk of infection. It is good to go outside and move around your own yard, garden or fields and there is no particular COVID-19 risk if you keep away from anyone from outside your household. Keeping active will probably improve your chances of making a good recovery if you do catch COVID-19.

## **Members of your household**

A very big part of controlling the risk depends on how other people in the household behave. If other household members take sensible precautions to reduce their risk of infection when they are out of the home this reduces the chance that they become infected and carry the virus home to you.

If there are members of your household that behave in ways that places them at high risk of catching COVID-19 that means they are also putting you at higher risk of catching COVID-19. If you own or control your home and if you are concerned that people in your household are behaving in ways that are placing you at high risk you should talk to them about your concerns. If they are not able to or are not willing to change their behaviour to help you to protect yourself, it may be time to consider if there is an alternative to sharing your home with that person(s). If you need help there are contact details for services that can help you on pages 4 and 5 of this document.

## **Keeping the risk as low as possible among the household**

Even if everyone in the household is careful, someone can catch COVID-19 through no fault of theirs. If this happens, there is a high risk that the infection will spread from one person in the household to others.

There are a limited number of things, other than vaccination, that are practical to do to reduce the risk of spread within a household if someone gets infected.

Everyone should know that they should go straight to a room to self-isolate if they develop symptoms of COVID-19. There are details on how to self-isolate on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie). If the person with infection has to leave their room they and everyone else should wear a surgical mask or a respirator mask and, keep as much distance as practical and check that there is adequate ventilation. They should also minimise contact with others in the house if they are a COVID-19 contact.

All members of the household should clean their hands (soap and water or use hand sanitiser) when they come into the house. It is a good idea to keep some hand sanitiser near the front door and encourage people to use it and to ensure gentle circulation of fresh air (ventilation) consistent with comfort and the weather.

You should avoid sharing toothbrushes, taking a bite from a piece of food someone else has bitten (like an apple) or a drink from a bottle or cup someone else is drinking from. The exception to this is if there are people in the household who you kiss on the mouth or with whom you share a bed. In that case, there is no additional risk in sharing items with them. Using cutlery, dishes and similar items that someone else in the house has used after they have been washed is safe.

### **Access for people who do not live in your household**

If you need care and support from home help the public health nurses or others working in the health service you should continue to take that help. Healthcare workers are told not to come to work if they have symptoms of COVID-19 and they are trained to reduce the risk that they might spread COVID-19 to you.

If you have family, friends or neighbours who come to your home to help you, try to make sure they are people you can trust to be responsible and that they know to stay away if they have symptoms. If you depend on friends, family or neighbours try to make a plan for how you will manage if a person you depend on gets COVID-19 or is worried that they might have COVID-19.

If you need people to come into your home to make repairs, try to make sure you are dealing with a reliable and trustworthy person or company who will not come to the house if they have symptoms or have been advised to limit their movements for any reason.

You may also want to have people come to your house just for a social visit. If you want to have visitors to your home try to keep the number of people who visit to a few people you trust. It is generally better if you have just 1 or 2 people at a time. There is no reason to believe that a visit from a child is a greater risk than a visit from an adult provided the child has no symptoms and is able to follow some simple rules.

If you have groceries or other things delivered to the house you can take the things right away; you do not need to leave them on the doorstep for a period of time.

### **Keeping the risk low when there are people from outside the household in the house**

1. The higher the current level of transmission of COVID-19 nationally or in your area the greater the risk of having additional people in the house.
2. Check with people if they have symptoms of COVID-19 before they come in.
3. You can ask them to clean their hands (soap and water or hand sanitiser). It is a good idea to keep hand sanitiser near the door.
4. You can ask them to wear a medical grade or respirator mask especially when they are in the same room as you are.
5. If you do not kiss, hug or shake hands and you can keep some distance between you and the other person, this will reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 if they are infectious.
6. If the person is family or a friend that you can trust and that comes to support you or on a social visit, there is very little extra risk in having a cup of tea, a snack or a meal together while they are in the house and talking to you.
7. If there is a friend or family member that you depend on a lot for support it is a good idea to have a list of people you can call on if that person becomes unwell. Family Carers Ireland has a range of practical supports and guide available to family carers during the COVID-19 pandemic, including an Emergency Care Plan Booklet.

8. It is safer not to share with visitors any towels, dishes cutlery or anything that is put near the eyes, nose or mouth (but dishes and cutlery are OK after they are washed).
9. If you can increase ventilation in the room, for example by opening or partly opening a window or a door this can reduce the risk of spread of virus when someone else is in the house. The goal is gentle air circulation rather than strong air movements. When opening windows and doors you do need allow for the weather and security so it may not always be possible to have windows or doors open.

### **When you leave home**

If you can control things to make your home safe, the biggest risk is when you are outside of home. The higher the current level of transmission of COVID-19 nationally or in your area the greater the risk of being among other people.

If you are working, you may be able to reduce how often you need to mix with other people by working from home all or most of the time. If you are immunocompromised and you need to leave home for work try to organise your work so that you come into contact with people as little as is practical. It may be useful to discuss with your employer how that can be organised.

If you are not immunocompromised but have other conditions that placed you at higher risk it is usually low risk to return to a work place if you are to date with vaccination. If you need advice on this talk to your occupational health service or your own doctor.

You may also be able to reduce how often you need to mix with other people in indoor public places, if neighbours, family or friends can do shopping and other jobs for you. How much you can get people to do for you depends upon having neighbours, family and friends you can rely on to be fair and honest with you. This is especially true if other people are handling your money or your credit cards. If are concerned that anyone may be taking advantage of your situation or making it difficult for you to keep in touch with other friends or family you can talk to someone at the HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team for your area (see contact details in Appendix 1). If you need help from an independent advocate you can contact SAGE (1850 71 94 00 from 8 in the morning until 10 at night). You can also talk to ALONE (0818 222 024 from 8 in the morning until

8 at night) or the HSE confidential recipient at 1890 1000 14.

If you need to contact your GP or other services, you may be able to use the phone so that you do not need to go to the practice. Plan ahead to make sure you know how to contact your doctor or out of hours service if you feel unwell. If your GP advises that you need to be seen at the surgery it is important that you attend. Remember to attend for your flu vaccine or other care that helps to keep you healthy.

If you are severely immunocompromised it is important that you contact your doctor promptly if you develop symptoms of COVID-19. This is true even after you have had extended primary vaccination (3 doses) and booster (fourth dose). You may be eligible for treatment with newer anti-virus treatments if the treatment can be started within 5 days of starting symptoms.

If you decided not to take vaccination and you are 65 years or older or if you are 12 to 64 years of age and have a medical condition it is important that you contact your doctor promptly if you develop symptoms of COVID-19. You may be eligible for treatment with newer antiviral treatments if the treatment can be started within 5 days of starting symptoms. It is much safer to get vaccine than to depend on treatment after you get infected.

You should continue to attend for all your regular healthcare appointments at hospital or clinics. The risk of catching COVID-19 is lower than the risk of missing out on healthcare that you need. Hospitals and clinics have put in place steps to protect you from being in contact with people with COVID-19.

When you need to go places, if it is possible for you to walk to the place, this is likely to be much safer than public transport. Walking, when possible, is good for health and wellbeing. If you need to use public transport it is best to avoid busy times. It is recommended that you should wear a medical grade or respirator mask while on public transport. If you are out for a drive in a car with members of your household and you have no contact with anyone else there is no additional risk of catching COVID-19 compared to staying at home.

If you decide that you want to visit someone, attend a religious service, go to the hairdresser, go to a café or some other service, think about the risk for you and plan to keep that as low as possible. Try to go to a place that you know will take reasonable care to keep everyone safe, try to go at a time when it is not busy and try not to mix with a lot of other people.

If you are in a place where there are other people and you find yourself near anyone who is coughing or looks feverish or sick move away to a safe distance as quickly as you can.

### **Preventing harm from COVID-19**

Most people who catch COVID-19 will recover. Your chance of recovering is likely to be better if:

1. You get vaccinated, including booster.
2. You keep your body active – make a plan for how to get exercise every day.
3. You keep your mind active – crosswords, puzzles, music, whatever works for you.
4. You look after your mental health – plan to keep in touch with people.
5. You have a healthy diet and are not overweight.
6. You do not smoke.
7. You take good care of any medical condition that you have.
8. You know if you are someone who might benefit from early treatment of COVID and if you are you contact your doctor early if you develop symptoms.

An up to date list of people in this group can be accessed here:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html>

\*If you are in any doubt about your level of risk for severe COVID-19 talk to your GP or Occupational Health Service.

## **Appendix 1 Contact Details for HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams**

The HSE has a social work service that you can contact if you have a concern about a vulnerable adult who may be at risk of abuse. There are nine teams located throughout the country. You can find information on how to get in touch with them below.

Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal

Ballyshannon Health Campus An Clochar, College Street, Ballyshannon Co. Donegal

Safeguarding.cho1@hse.ie

071-9834660

Roscommon, Galway and Mayo

La Nua, Castlepark Road, Ballybane, Galway.

Safeguarding.cho2@hse.ie

091-748432

Clare, Limerick and N.Tipp/East Limerick

Health Centre, Tyone, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.

Safeguarding.cho3@hse.ie

067-46470

Cork and Kerry

Unit 24/25, Doughcloyne Industrial Estate, Wilton, Cork.

Safeguarding.cho4@hse.ie

021-4927550

South Tipp, Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford

HSE Offices Dublin Road, Lacken, Kilkenny City Co. Kilkenny

Safeguarding.cho5@hse.ie

056-7784325

Wicklow, Dun Laoghaire and Dublin South East

Ballinteer Health Centre, Ballinteer Avenue, Ballinteer, Dublin 16.

Safeguarding.cho6@hse.ie

01-2164511

Kildare, Wicklow, Dublin West, Dublin South City and Dublin South West

Beech House, 101-102 Naas Business Park, Naas, Co. Kildare.

Safeguarding.cho7@hse.ie

045-920410

Laois, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath, Louth and Meath

Ashbourne Primary Care Centre, Declan Street, Ashbourne, Co. Meath.

Safeguarding.cho8@hse.ie

01-6914632

Dublin North, Dublin North Central and Dublin North West.

St. Mary Hospital, Phoenix Park, Dublin 20.

Safeguarding.cho9@hse.ie

076-6959528

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