

COVID-19: Guidance for Hospitality Businesses

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Version	Date	Changes from previous version
2.0	17/11/2021	Updated links to gov.ie Added that physical distance of at least 1 metre is considered best practice between tables
1.9	16/11/2021	Updated link to National Contact Tracing document
1.8	20/09/2021	Added link to gov.ie
1.7	06/09/2021	Removed references to 1 hour 45
1.6	31/08/2021	Clarified advice for Symptomatic individuals. Inclusion of ventilation advice. Title changed to hospitality, preface and background information on current situation with vaccine programme added. Information on transmission added.
1.5	06/07/2021	Comment added regarding requirement in relation to evidence of vaccination or immunity post recovery Time limit on attendance removed in view of above requirement Reference to Failte Ireland's guidance on ventilation for relevant sectors included.
1.4	28/05/2021	Updated link added referring out to new guidance document regarding
1.3	11/03/2020	Clarified that not all customers will be able to pay via contactless methods and no customers should be disadvantaged by this recommendation.

1.2	19/10/2020	Link to Government Resilience and Recovery Plan and Framework for Restrictive Measures added
1.1		Clarified wording re contact tracing measures in Appendix 1 Added information and link to ventilation document

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Preface

These guidelines have been updated to reflect the evolving situation in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the vaccination programme in Ireland. This document outlines the public health measures that supports food and hospitality businesses to reopen in a safe manner and reduce the transmission of COVID-19. [Current Government Guidelines](#) must be adhered to and should be read in conjunction with this document.

This document must be read in conjunction with **COVID-19 guidance which has been provided to food businesses** by other agencies:

1. [Work Safely Protocol](#) which applies to all workplaces and has its basis in the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act 2005.
2. [Department of Health Expert Group on the role of Ventilation in Reducing Transmission of COVID-19](#)
3. [NSAI Guidance for Retailers](#)
4. Fáilte Ireland's [Guidelines for indoor hospitality](#)
5. [FSAI Guidance and FAQs](#) on food safety during COVID-19
6. Irish Government COVID-19 "[Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19](#)" risk management strategy

Key points

- The gathering together of people indoors, especially in crowded, poorly-ventilated settings, has been associated with a higher risk of infection with COVID-19.
- The COVID-19 vaccination programme is well advanced in Ireland, however, there is still an ongoing risk of COVID-19 especially due to the emergence of new variants. Precautions to prevent introduction and spread of the virus in indoor settings are therefore still required even in the context of community vaccination.
- Indoor hospitality must operate in adherence to Government regulations in relation to evidence of COVID-19 vaccination or immunity following recovery.
- **Key elements in organising and planning safely:**
 - A risk assessment is required to determine how many people can attend within the current requirements of social distancing and to determine the adequacy of the ventilation in indoor spaces. Please follow [Government guidelines](#) relating to capacity limits for indoor events.
 - Adequate ventilation of indoor spaces, either through natural ventilation (i.e. opening windows and external doors) or by mechanical means (e.g. central air-conditioning unit) is extremely important. All premises must ensure that appropriate corrective measures are taken to improve ventilation in facilities where ventilation is identified as being inadequate following a risk assessment. Please see [here](#) for further information on ventilation.
 - Good communication with staff and customers advising that they do not to attend if experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Anyone who develops [symptoms](#) (staff or customers) while on the premises should be asked to go home immediately.
 - A physical distance of at least 1 metre between tables is considered best practice. There should be a minimum of 15 minutes between bookings in order to allow adequate time for cleaning and ventilation and to allow customers to leave and enter, without mixing.
 - Time limit slots **are no longer required.**
 - Provision of [Alcohol-based hand rub/sanitizer](#) for use at entry, exit and other appropriate points within the space.
 - Provision of tissues and bins for safe disposal.
 - Provision and regular maintenance of hand-washing facilities, including soap dispensers and disposable towels and sanitary facilities.

- Regular cleaning of frequently touched hard surfaces frequently touched, such as door handles, hand rails, taps are cleaned regularly with a household detergent. Touching of surfaces should be minimised.
- Customers are required to wear a face covering/face mask when entering and leaving the premises and when going to and from the bathroom.
- Customers should be discouraged from mingling with other tables
- Staff hygiene practices effective in controlling COVID-19 to continue and include:
 - employees must wear face coverings/masks at all times
 - frequent hand hygiene – washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - frequent use of alcohol-based hand sanitisers;
 - good respiratory etiquette (cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; dispose of tissues and wash hands);
 - frequent cleaning/disinfection of work surfaces and touch points such as door handles;
 - avoiding close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

Background

From July 26th 2021, indoor hospitality re-opened with robust protective measures and adherence to Government regulations in relation to evidence of COVID-19 vaccination or immunity following recovery. Please see [here](#) for further information

Despite this, food and hospitality business operators must continue to comply with the requirements of Food Control Legislation, based on the principles of HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point), as per legislative requirements. These systems are underpinned by good hygiene practices, cleaning and sanitation and fitness to work.

There continues to be a requirement for the food and hospitality businesses to ensure compliance with measures to protect food workers and service users from contracting COVID-19, to mitigate exposure risks and transmission of the virus, and to strengthen food hygiene and sanitation practices.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the principal way to prevent the spread of the virus was by implementing a series of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), such as physical distancing, wearing of a face covering and frequent hand hygiene. However, effective vaccines against COVID-19 are now available and a robust vaccination programme is underway in Ireland. This is an additional and important intervention to prevent the spread of the virus. However, it should be acknowledged that while a large proportion of the population are now fully vaccinated, there is still an ongoing risk of COVID-19 and community transmission among vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Precautions to prevent introduction and spread of the virus in indoor places are therefore still required even in the context of community vaccination.

The rationale behind this is that although the COVID-19 vaccine has been proven to reduce the risk of severe disease or hospitalisation, it does not prevent all infection. Additionally, there is now some concern that the vaccine may be less effective against some virus variants. For this reason, to help manage that risk, existing recommended infection prevention and control measures and non-pharmaceutical interventions should remain in place.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to highlight key public health measures for food and hospitality businesses to mitigate exposure to or transmission of the virus, and to maintain the health and safety of staff and customers. Food and hospitality businesses should follow Government advice and operate in line with them.

Scope

This guidance covers food and hospitality businesses such as restaurants and cafés (controlled environments). This guidance does not cover retail outlets e.g. take-away food outlets (uncontrolled environments).

Transmission of COVID-19

The virus is spread mainly through the air from the respiratory tract (nose or mouth) of a person with the infection. The virus can reach the respiratory tract mucosa (eyes, nose and mouth) of a susceptible person in two ways:

1. Travelling directly through the air to the respiratory tract or
2. Indirectly as a result of contamination of hands or other surfaces and subsequent transfer to the respiratory mucosa.

The risk of transmission through the air is dependent on a number of factors and include, how much virus is being shed by the infectious person, how close the susceptible person is to the infectious person, how forcefully the infectious person is scattering particles (for example, when the infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, sings, shouts or laughs) and what barriers are in place (e.g. masks).

There is evidence that COVID-19 outbreaks are more commonly associated with crowded indoor spaces, and that poor ventilation may increase the risk of transmission in such settings by facilitating the spread of liquid respiratory particles over longer distances (See [here](#))

Potential transmission of COVID-19 via food

There is no evidence to date that viruses that cause respiratory illnesses are being transmitted via food or food packaging. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and the primary transmission route is through person-to-person contact and through direct contact with liquid respiratory particles generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Coronaviruses cannot multiply in food; they need an animal or human host to multiply.

Although COVID-19 genetic material (RNA) has been isolated from stool samples of infected individuals, there is no evidence of faecal-oral transmission. Handwashing after using the toilet is always an essential practice, especially when working with food.

It is imperative for food service businesses to reinforce personal hygiene measures and provide refresher training on food hygiene principles to eliminate or reduce the risk of food surfaces and food packaging materials becoming contaminated with the virus from food service workers.

In addition, the food and hospitality businesses are advised to optimise physical distancing and stringent hygiene and sanitation measures and promote frequent and effective handwashing and sanitation at each stage of food service. These measures will protect staff from spreading COVID-19 among workers and help to protect both the workforce and customers.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the work environment

Occupational health/Food workers

COVID-19 illness in the workplace

Advice for close contacts vary and depend on a number of factors such as: previous infection, vaccination status, and whether the contact(s) have been exposed to a confirmed case who has travelled from a designated state. Please see [‘National Guidelines for Public Health management of contacts of cases’](#) for advice.

Communication

Staff need to be aware that they **should not** report to work with symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have been in contact with a person with COVID-19 and advised to restrict movement due to this contact. They should be advised to notify their employer by telephone. However, if a worker displays any symptoms of the virus during work hours, the advice in the [government COVID-19 resources](#) for return to work safely should be followed.

A procedure to allow staff to report illness by phone (or email) should be established. Staff should be made aware of sick pay entitlement in order to encourage them to stay out of work in the scenarios described above.

Food and hospitality businesses must ensure that COVID-19 infected (symptomatic individuals and confirmed asymptomatic carriers) workers and their close contacts* (those with exposure to confirmed cases) are excluded from food premises. **Please note not all close contacts will be excluded from work places. This is dependent on a number of factors such as: vaccination status, previous infection, being symptomatic and whether the contact(s) have been exposed to a confirmed case who has travelled from a designated state. Please see [here](#) for further information.*

Staff training

Staff working in food premises should be provided with language appropriate training on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and there should be strict supervision of COVID-19 control measures. For further information please see the [Work Safely Protocol](#) for further information.

Staff who have not had close contact with a confirmed case should continue taking the usual precautions and attend work as usual. Organising employees into small teams or workgroups will
HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre. www.hpsc.ie

help to minimise disruption to workforce in the event of an employee reporting sick with symptoms of COVID-19.

Employees must be trained on what to do if they or a customer becomes unwell. If management is alerted to a suspected case of COVID-19 at the restaurant, medical advice should be sought by phone.

The Work Safely Protocol sets out the steps and processes that businesses must take to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, how they will deal with a suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace and the return to work policies.

The HSE protocols in relation to contact tracing, close contacts, self-isolation and restricted movements can be found on the [HSE website](#).

Awareness of COVID-19 symptoms

For the purpose of this guidance, food workers include food handlers, kitchen staff, waiting staff and people who directly touch open food as part of their work. It also includes staff who may touch food contact surfaces or other surfaces in rooms where open food is handled. The term can therefore also apply to managers, cleaners, maintenance contractors, delivery workers.

It can take up to 14 days for symptoms of COVID-19 to show. Infection can spread from people before they get symptoms. Some people with infection will have no symptoms, or have symptoms that are so mild that they take little notice of them, but they can still spread infection.

People who are feeling unwell should stay at home. Food business operators must ensure that staff are aware of COVID-19 symptoms, exclusion from work policies, and where to access further information. **The most important issue is for staff to be able to recognise symptoms early so that they can seek appropriate testing and medical care, and minimise the risk of infecting fellow workers.**

Symptoms of COVID-19 can be similar to the symptoms of [colds](#) and [flu](#). It is essential to remind all staff not to attend work if (i) they are ill with [symptoms of COVID-19](#) or (ii) they have been in contact with a person with COVID-19 and advised to restrict movement due to this contact.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the work environment

Environmental risk assessment

A risk assessment should be carried out for each premises to determine how many people can attend within the requirements of social distancing, ensuring adequate ventilation and to identify high risk points in the building, e.g. narrow entrance/exits. Please follow [Government guidelines](#) with regards to organisation of indoor group activities.

Ventilation

Failté Ireland sector-specific guidance in relation to ventilation should be implemented. There is substantial evidence that COVID-19 spreads more easily in overcrowded poorly ventilated settings. COVID-19 outbreaks are more commonly associated with crowded indoor spaces, and poor ventilation may increase the risk of transmission in such settings by facilitating the spread of droplets over longer distances (See [here](#)). Ensure adequate ventilation of any indoor spaces, either through natural ventilation (i.e. opening windows and external doors) or by mechanical means (e.g. central air-conditioning unit). Please see the [Work Safely Protocol](#) and the [health and safety authority checklist for employers](#) for further information. Spread is also more likely to occur if cloth face coverings or masks are not being used properly, and if those present are singing or shouting.

Physical distancing in the work environment

Physical distancing is very important to help slow the spread of COVID-19. This is achieved by minimising contact between potentially infected individuals and healthy individuals. In a controlled environment, such as restaurants and cafés, physical distancing of at least 1 metre is considered best practice between tables.

It is advisable for staff to optimise physical distance between each other where possible.

Where the food services environment makes it difficult to physically distance, employers need to consider what measures to put in place to protect employees.

Examples of practical measures to adhere to physical distancing guidance in the food services environment are to:

- Stagger workstations on either side of service area so that food workers are not facing one

another;

- Provide PPE if required, such as face masks, disposable gloves and clean overalls. The use of PPE would be routine in high-risk areas of food premises that produce ready-to-eat and cooked foods. When staff are dressed in PPE it is possible to reduce distance between workers. A mask provides better protection than a visor, which should not be used unless there are specific problems with using the face mask;
- Limit the number of staff in a food preparation area at any one time;
- Organise staff into working groups or teams to facilitate reduced interaction between groups.

Physical barriers, can be useful, such as sneeze guards/plexiglass and partitions, particularly in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain apart, for example in restaurant kitchens and at cash registers, host stands, food pickup areas or between tables where maintaining physical distance is difficult. These physical barriers need to be regularly cleaned and disinfected.

Practices and procedures

Hand hygiene

Good personal hygiene practices effective in controlling COVID-19 include:

- Food businesses need to ensure that adequate sanitary facilities are provided and ensure that food workers are trained and understand the importance of cleaning their hands regularly and thoroughly.
- Frequent hand hygiene – washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- Respiratory hygiene and good cough etiquette (covering mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; disposal of tissues and hand hygiene);
- Regular cleaning/disinfection of work surfaces and touch points such as door handles;
- Avoiding close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.
- Adequate supplies of tissues and hand hygiene facilities should be provided and replaced regularly.

Use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

For further detailed information see the [Work Safely Protocol](#).

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be worn by employees as required by their roles. Personal protective equipment (PPE), can be effective in reducing the spread of viruses and disease within the food industry, but only if used properly. Training on how to properly use, apply and dispose of all PPE must be provided.

Face coverings

As per [Government guidance](#), the use of face coverings is required in certain settings. Customers can take off the mask when eating but they must wear a mask on entering and leaving the premises and when going to and from the bathroom facilities. Children under the age of 13 are exempt. The [Work Safely Protocol](#) advises employers to make face coverings available to the worker in line with Public Health advice.

If face coverings are worn they must be clean and they must not be shared or handled by other colleagues. Employers and employees must keep up-to-date with the latest Public Health advice with regard to face coverings.

A cloth face covering or mask provides better protection than a visor, which should not be used unless there are specific problems with using the cloth face coverings or masks. The use of surgical masks rather than face cloth coverings is now recommended to be worn by people who are in [high risk](#) and [very high risk cohorts](#) when in confined community spaces. Further guidance on the use of face coverings for the general public can be found [here](#).

Disposable gloves

- It is acceptable to prepare and handle food with bare hands provided proper hand washing procedures are in place.
- Gloves may be used by food workers for food handling, according to usual food safety guidance, but they must ensure that the gloves are changed frequently and that hands are washed before putting gloves on, between glove changes and when gloves are removed.
- Household gloves may also be required for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and handling chemicals
- Regular hand hygiene is extremely important, whether using gloves or not. Handwashing provides a greater barrier to infection than wearing disposable gloves.
- Gloves must be changed after carrying out non-food related activities such as

opening/closing doors by hand, emptying bins, handling money, answering the telephone, using the bathroom etc.

- Food workers should be aware that wearing gloves can allow bacteria to build up on the surface of the hands, so hand hygiene is extremely important when gloves are removed to avoid subsequent contamination of food.

Delivery of food ingredients and food products

All delivery personnel must follow the Government's Public Health advice on physical distancing when picking up and dropping off deliveries:

- Wear suitable clean and protective clothing where necessary.
- Maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness.
- Clean hands before and after each delivery transaction. The use of gloves is not recommended as this can give a false sense of security. Hand washing is best practice.

If possible, delivery drivers should not be allowed to enter the site (with the exception of food deliveries which adhere to HACCP delivery protocols). Employees must not come in close contact with drivers.

Open food display

There is currently no scientific evidence suggesting that food is associated with transmission of the COVID-19 virus, including open food displays.

It is important to maintain good hygiene practices around open food displays, such as salad bars, fresh produce displays and bakery products. Both customers and staff should strictly observe good personal hygiene practices at all times around open food areas.

Appendix 1 Controlled and uncontrolled environments¹

Controlled environments

Public and private venues or workplaces are considered 'controlled' environments. Examples are workplaces, schools, museums, swimming pools, galleries, cinemas, stadiums, conference facilities and casinos. Food businesses are considered 'controlled' environments, which includes restaurants and cafes.

Requirements for food businesses

Controlled environments

- A risk assessment should be carried out for each premises to determine how many people can attend within the requirements of social distancing, ensuring adequate ventilation and to identify high risk points in the building, e.g. narrow entrance/exits.
- Ensure adequate ventilation of any indoor spaces, either through natural ventilation (i.e. opening windows and external doors) or by mechanical means (e.g. central air-conditioning unit).
- Use additional signage reminding customers not to enter if they have symptoms suggestive of COVID-19
- Regulate entry so that the premises do not become overcrowded. Encourage pre-booking as much as possible. A text may be sent to remind the guest to stay away if unwell.
- Use floor markings inside the premises to facilitate compliance with the social distancing advice of 2 metres, particularly in the most crowded areas, such as serving counters and tills
- Use vertical signage to direct customers to facilitate movement within the premises while maintaining 2 metre distance
- Make regular announcements to remind customers to follow social distancing advice and clean their hands regularly
- Place plexiglass barriers at tills and counters if feasible, as an additional element of protection for workers and customers

¹ Source: Ministry of Health, New Zealand: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/guidelines-businesses-and-services-alert-level-2>

- Adequate hand hygiene and toilet facilities. Provide additional pop-up hand hygiene stations or facilities if possible, providing soap, water and hand sanitiser
- Establish and supervise a schedule of frequent cleaning and ventilation of bathrooms and frequently touched surfaces
- Customers should be seated at a table except when using the toilet, paying, and departing.
- Clear signage should indicate the location of and route to the bathrooms
- Limit the number of servers per group of guests to the smallest number that is practical.
- There is a limit of on the number of people gathering in a venue at one time – in line with NPHET guidance on indoor gatherings. Multiple gatherings are allowed in venue facilities provided they are in separate ‘defined spaces’ and there are systems to prevent intermingling in common spaces (e.g., entrances, exits and toilet facilities).
- Keep contact details for the person making the booking. Explain that the reason for keeping these records is to provide them to Public Health for contact tracing in the event that someone becomes ill with COVID-19. These records should be kept for 1 month.
- Physical distancing of at least 1 metre is considered best practice between tables. There should be a minimum of 15 minutes between bookings in order to allow for appropriate cleaning, adequate ventilation and to allow customers to leave and enter, without mixing.
- Encourage the use of contactless payments where possible, recognising that not all customers will be able to pay via contactless methods. This recommendation should not disadvantage any customers.
- Use disposable menus or laminated menus that can be adequately cleaned after each use.
- Unnecessary items should be removed from tables and single use rather than shared condiments should be provided.

Considerations:

- Where at all practical, workers should provide services to only 1 gathering and should not move between multiple gatherings in different venue locations (e.g. two different function rooms).

- Where possible, facilities such as toilets should not be used simultaneously by multiple gatherings. However, if they are cleaned in between usage and adequately ventilated, they may be used separately by different gatherings, within the same time period.

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