Guidance Document on Infection Prevention and Control Practices in Relation to Attending Face to Face Gatherings in HSE settings during the Global COVID-19 Pandemic

V1.2 02.11.2021

This guidance was based on earlier versions which were developed for face to face education sessions in collaboration between the Office of Nursing and Midwifery Services Department and the Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control (AMRIC) Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Changes from previous version</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>02.11.2021</td>
<td>Broadened to address face to face interactions in a variety of settings within HSE</td>
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<td>Increased reference to vaccination and the vaccination certificate (where required)</td>
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<td>Reference to influenza and influenza vaccination</td>
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<td>Editorial changes including removal of some duplication</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>05.07.2021</td>
<td>Updated to reflect change in terminology from extremely vulnerable to very high risk.</td>
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<td>Link to very high risk (extremely vulnerable) group categorisation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Information on vaccination and its role in reducing risk associated with delivering face to face education</td>
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<td>Reference to the need to consider the Framework Level for Public Health restrictions in effect at the time</td>
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<td>Updated to reflect benefits of vaccine protection</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>30.07.2020</td>
<td>Original guidance document</td>
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Note: If you have any queries on this guidance please contact the AMRIC team at hcai.amrteam@hse.ie
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Purpose
The purpose of this guidance document is to outline the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) practices in relation to attendance at and organisation of work-related face to face gatherings for HSE staff, in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic (hereafter referred to as Guidance Document). The guidance is relevant to preventing transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and other viral agents transmitted in similar way including influenza virus.

This Guidance Document is underpinned and informed by relevant publications from the Department of Health (DoH), Health Service Executive (HSE), Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), Health and Safety Authority (H&SA) and the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) professional regulatory body including:


Target Audience
This Guidance Document applies to any person organising or attending meetings/ hearings/ tribunals/ education and training programmes across a range of work-related settings within the HSE.

Overall Approach to Management of COVID-19 Risk
Any assembly of people for any purpose is associated with a risk of transmission of infection. This is particularly true during a pandemic. Therefore, the first step in managing the risk is to consider if the assembly of people is required to achieve the objectives of the group. When this is the optimal or is the only way to achieve the objectives and the risk can be managed, the pandemic should not be a barrier to necessary activities.

In any assembly of people, there are three components to managing COVID-19 related risk:

1. Taking all practical measures to ensure that no one with infectious COVID-19 is present in the group at any time. If the virus is not introduced into the group, it cannot spread.
This relates to making sure that facilitators, participants and any supporting staff have no clinical features of COVID-19 or other viral respiratory tract infection. In addition those attending should not be within the defined infectious period for COVID-19, and should not be subject to a recommendation to restrict their movements because of exposure to COVID-19.

2. All those attending the event should be advised to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. They should also be advised to have taken influenza vaccine if they are eligible for vaccination. Organisers should check if the legal requirement to check for COVID-19 vaccination certificates applies to some events or to elements of some events.

3. Taking all practical measures to reduce the risk that the virus will spread if introduced. This relates to the venue itself, its amenities and to the behaviour of all of those attending the event.

4. Taking all practical measures to reduce the harm that will arise if the virus is introduced and spreads. The harm associated with introduction and spread of the virus depends on the age and underlying health status of participants, the speed with which any evidence of transmission is identified and managed and access to healthcare for those who need care. If all those attending the event are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza (if eligible), the risk of harm from spread of COVID-19 and influenza is greatly reduced.

Vaccination
Vaccination against COVID-19 is a very effective way of protecting people against severe disease and death from COVID-19. The vaccine also helps to reduce the risk that someone can spread the infection to other people. Influenza vaccination helps to reduce risk of spread and the consequences of spread of influenza virus.

Individuals are considered fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as set out here:

1. 15 days after second dose of AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria);
2. 7 days after the second Pfizer-BioNTech dose (Comirnaty);
3. 14 days after the second Moderna dose (Spikevax);
4. 14 days after Janssen (one dose vaccination course).

Those who are eligible for additional doses or booster doses are advised to accept those as
soon as they are offered.

Those who are fully vaccinated can expect to have a very high degree of protection from severe COVID-19. However, the vaccine protection is not perfect. It may not work so well in people who have a condition or who are on a treatment that interferes with their immune system (immunocompromised). This means that people are advised to continue to be very careful after vaccination especially if they have a problem with their immune system.

Minimising Risk of Spread of Infection Prior to the Event
Those attending the event should be reminded in advance/at pre-registration to consider if by virtue of their age or underlying health condition or vaccination status if they are at high risk of severe disease if they acquire COVID-19. People who are at high risk of severe disease should be particularly careful with respect to adherence to all IPC precautions if they decide that attendance is appropriate for them. Categorisation of very high risk groups can be found in the following link: https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html

1. Where possible, participants should confirm when confirming attendance for the event they are familiar with the symptoms of COVID-19 and influenza will not attend if they have symptoms. They should confirm that they will not attend if they have been advised to self-isolate because they are infectious or to restrict movements because they are contacts of people with COVID-19.

2. In so far as practical, it is appropriate to plan for alternative event facilitators to be available at short notice in case facilitator must not attend for any reason.

3. If anyone due to attend the event is currently working directly in a location where there is a suspected or confirmed outbreak of COVID-19, they may attend the training provided they confirm they are not in the infectious period of COVID-19 illness, have not been advised to restrict their movements and have been following recommended IPC guidance.
Minimising Risk of Spread of Infection During the Event
The event facilitator/organiser must identify any levels of risk associated with the proposed activities of the group and include the necessary controls to manage the risk.

Facilities and venues
1. A risk assessment of the venue is recommended in line with the type of session to determine if the venue supports measures to limit the spread of infection and to identify additional measures that can be implemented (see Appendix 1).
2. Erect appropriate signage that promotes physical distancing/respiratory etiquette/hand hygiene. These should be clearly displayed in all areas.
3. Ensure appropriate hand hygiene facilities are in place to accommodate those attending to adhere to hand hygiene practices.
4. Ensure tissues, and pedal bins are in place to accommodate those attending to adhere to respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
5. Have a supply of masks available in case anyone attending needs to replace their mask during the event.
6. All spaces proposed for use for the event should allow for the recommended physical distancing both on entry to, and occupation of, as per HSE/HPSC guidelines. Where necessary, floor marking may be considered.
7. Promote good ventilation in so far as practical consistent with comfort and security. The goal is gentle air circulation rather than strong air movements.
8. All frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned at the end of the day or end of each session (for example prior to and immediately after each session if more than one session with different participants is taking place in one day).

Equipment, for example for training sessions
1. Single use items for simulation training should be used where possible.
2. All reusable teaching equipment that participants will need including mannequins and any medical devices should be cleaned before and after each training session/training day as per manufacturers’ guidelines.
3. Training involving contact between the mouth and equipment should be avoided unless essential.

4. Additional PPE including gloves and aprons are generally not required in training sessions in line with standard precautions.

5. Where Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is required normally as part of the training for example teaching a skill, this practice is to be continued and no additional PPE is required.

6. When people meet indoors and can’t maintain physical distance they should wear masks or face covering as per public health guidance

Facilitators
1. Select a venue that can facilitate the anticipated number of participants with adequate distance between each person.

2. All persons are required to perform hand hygiene on entering and leaving the facility.

3. The facilitator needs to reiterate the importance of physical distancing, hand hygiene and cough etiquette at the commencement and during all sessions.

4. The facilitator needs to reiterate that if a participant becomes unwell during a session s/he must inform the facilitator immediately and make arrangements to leave the group.

5. The facilitator should support the participant to leave the session and make arrangements to go home if a participant reports that s/he has become unwell with suspected COVID-19 or influenza symptoms during the session.

6. The session should commence on time to avoid congregation of participants on entry to the venue or room.

7. The facilitator must maintain an attendance record with contact details of everyone present. The list should be maintained for a minimum period of 4 weeks for potential contact tracing purposes.

8. The facilitator may liaise with local catering department to manage and arrange breaks (including staggering these if necessary) to maintain physical distancing.

9. The facilitator ensures there are arrangements for cleaning of contact surfaces of all podiums, tables, electronic equipment and devices as per HSE instructions on how to clean items using approved cleaning materials at start and end of each session.
Participants on arrival to the venue
1. Participants should maintain current physical distancing recommendations on entering the venue and avoid any congregation at venue entrance.
2. Participants will be directed to undertake hand hygiene on entering the venue.

In the room
1. Participants should bring their own essential personal items and use their own pen to sign in. All items to remain within personal space where practical.
2. Participants will be directed to an available space and should remain within this area in so far as practical unless directed by the facilitator.
3. During longer sessions, participants will be provided with adequate breaks. Where practical, consider staggered breaks and a sequenced process for exit of the room to avoid congregation at the exit. Generally, it will be appropriate for those seated nearest the exits to leave first and for others to follow in sequence. Current physical distancing recommendations should be maintained during break times. Where an outdoor space is available and weather permits, breaks may be taken outdoors.
4. If a participant becomes unwell during a session, they must inform the facilitator immediately and remove themselves to a suitable area outside the room and go home. If there is a delay until they can leave, the person must go to a separate room. Thereafter, the advice is to self-isolate and contact their General Practitioner (GP) and their local Occupational Health Department without delay.
5. Local arrangements should be in place to manage cleaning after a possible COVID-19 case, refer to the cleaning and decontamination in the following guidance link: (Acute Hospital Infection Prevention and Control Precautions for Possible or Confirmed COVID-19 in a Pandemic Setting)

Monitoring and Evaluation
Each service area/ organisation implementing this Guidance Document must ensure robust governance and accountability processes for monitoring and evaluation is in place.
Appendix 1: Sample Risk Assessment Form for Group Interaction
(Adapted from the HSE National Health and Safety Function (NHFS) Risk Assessment Document)

Example: Risk Assessment Prompt List

Has the requirement for face-to-face interaction been assessed and identified as necessary?

Yes / No?  If yes, please consider the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazard controls to be considered</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Comments/ Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Are all those attending reminded of the risk to themselves and others if they are not fully vaccinated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Have organisers checked if all or parts of the event require checking of COVID-19 vaccination certificates in line with Government guidance</td>
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<td>3. Is there a cleaning schedule that allows cleaning of rooms used at least twice daily if in use?</td>
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<tr>
<td>i.e. prior to and immediately after each session if more than one session with different participants is taking place or at the end of the day</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Are there appropriate supplies of hand washing facilities/ gel/ tissues and appropriate bins?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Are the rooms adequately ventilated? Can a window and a door remain open?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Are there posters and signage prominently in place reminding participants and staff of physical distancing and other measures to prevent transmission?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>i.e. hand washing/respiratory etiquette</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Are breaks staggered with other groups to avoid gathering of groups where physical distancing may be breached?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Can the room/ venue accommodate current physical distancing requirements for all participants attending?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes/no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If no, are measures in place to limit transmission such as;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-where physical distancing can’t be maintained are surgical face masks available?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Is equipment that will be used cleaned appropriately in line with manufacturer’s recommendations prior to and at the end of each session?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Are arrangements in place to clean and disinfect the venue in the event of a participant becoming unwell with symptoms of a respiratory illness as per HPSC guidance?</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
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ENDS