

**COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for family and friends (informal carers) who support people in their own homes**  
**V2.3 23.02.2022**  
**HSE Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control**

Version	Date	Changes from previous version
2.3	23.02.2022	Shortened by removing duplication Update to section on those at high risk and the role of vaccination Information on early treatment for certain people who develop symptoms Update on duration of immunity after recover from COVID-19
2.2	07.07.2021	Change in terminology and definitions on vaccine protection
2.1	22.06.2021	Updated to reflect advise to stay away if you have symptoms even if you have been vaccinated or already had COVID-19 Revised to include significant vaccine protection and immunity after recovery from COVID 19
2.0	06.04.2021	Updated to reflect change in terminology from extremely vulnerable to very high risk Updated to refer to risk of airborne spread Link to very high risk (extremely vulnerable) group categorisation Information on the importance of vaccination and changes related to fully vaccinated people
1.0	21.12.2020	Original guidance document

**Note: If you have any queries on this guidance please contact the AMRIC team at [hcai.amrteam@hse.ie](mailto:hcai.amrteam@hse.ie)**

**The most important things to do to protect a person you care for from COVID-19 are:**

- 1. Stay away** if you have COVID-19 until at least 7 days after your symptoms started
- 2. Stay away** if you have new symptoms of any viral infection. Stay away until at least 2 days after you feel better. **Stay away when you have symptoms of acute infection even if you have completed your vaccination and had a booster**
- 3. Protect yourself** from COVID-19 - if you do not catch it you cannot spread it to the person you support and care for
- 4. Be up to date** with your vaccination against COVID-19 including booster

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## **Introduction**

Older people and some other people with underlying health conditions who are not vaccinated are at high risk of developing severe disease with COVID-19. Even after vaccination older people and those with serious medical conditions may still be more at risk than younger otherwise healthy people. People who have very weak immune system function (severely immunocompromised) may not get full benefit from vaccination and may still be at high risk even when up to date with all their vaccination.

It is very important to do reduce the risk of bringing the virus into the home of people at special risk. Some people who are at greater risk may need support in their home, for example help with taking medicines, personal care, cooking, housework and similar tasks. People who have difficulty getting out of the house may also have people who come to provide companionship.

In some cases health and social care, workers provide this support but very often family and friends provide it.

Family and friends who visit their relatives/neighbours' homes to provide this support are sometime called informal carers. In this document, the term carer is used for convenience.

## **Purpose of document**

The purpose of this paper is to explain the main things that you can do to reduce the risk that you bring COVID-19 to the person you care for and to reduce the risk that you could catch COVID-19 from that person. There is a great deal of detailed additional information about COVID-19 on the HSE.ie or HPSC.ie websites if you want to find out more.

## **Scope**

This guidance has been developed to help carers and people who are cared for to protect each other from COVID-19. It is also intended to help healthcare workers who advise people who provide care about how to keep safe from infection.

## **Brief background information on COVID-19**

People usually catch COVID-19 from being close to a person who is infectious. The person you catch it from might not have any way of knowing that they have COVID-19 at the time. The more people you spend time with, the greater the risk that you will catch COVID-19, especially if anyone you meet and spend time with has symptoms. The risk is greatest if you are close to people

indoors. In general, the fewer people you meet indoors, the safer you are. If you stay safe then that helps to keep anyone you care for safe.

The virus, which causes COVID-19, spreads mainly through liquid respiratory particles scattered by talking, laughing, coughing and sneezing. These can land in a person's eyes, nose or mouth and this can cause infection. The fluid particles can also land on something like a table or the cover of a book or magazine. If someone touches something that is contaminated with infectious fluid particles and then puts their hand to their eye, nose or mouth before they clean their hand this can also cause infection. The virus can also spread over longer distances indoors by infectious fluid particles in some circumstances.

Fever, cough, shortness of breath and loss of sense of smell or taste are some of the common symptoms of COVID-19. Many frail older people may not have these symptoms when they first become ill. They may just feel generally unwell, lose their appetite, become confused and have an unexplained change in their usual condition. Some people with COVID-19 have no illness at all but they might still spread COVID-19.

## **Vaccination**

Vaccination against COVID-19 is a very effective way of protecting people against severe disease and death from COVID-19. People who are vaccinated can become infected but the symptoms are usually much milder after vaccination.

Vaccines do not provide protection from the day you got your first dose. The protection builds up over time. Two weeks after you finished your primary vaccine course, you had a good deal of protection against severe disease. For most people the primary course was two doses. For immunocompromised people the primary course is extended (three doses). Booster vaccination (the third dose for most people, the fourth dose for immunocompromised) is key in maintaining the protection from your original vaccines.

The vaccine can also help to some degree to reduce the risk that someone can spread the infection to other people but it does not stop the risk of spread. If you were vaccinated and booster vaccinated this protects you and the person you care for.

Even after you have completed vaccination, you should stay away from other people if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or any other viral infection. You could still have COVID-19 and you could be infectious. If you do not have COVID-19 you may have some other virus infection that may

also be harmful to the person you care for.

## **COVID-19 and Immunity after Recovery**

People who have had COVID-19 since December 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 are not likely to catch it again in the 3 months after they had it. Even if you already had COVID-19 in the last 3 months, you should stay away from other people if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or any other viral infection.

### **Before you visit**

1. You can get information about who is at risk at this link <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html>
2. Protect others by protecting yourself. If you do not catch COVID-19, you cannot give it to anyone. The greatest risk of catching COVID-19 is if you are with a large number of people indoors or in any other closed space.
3. If you clean your hands, keep as much distance as you can and wear a surgical mask or a respirator mask. That reduces your risk of catching infection;
4. Try to plan ahead and ask one or two people you know who could take over caring duties for you at short notice if you do not feel well;
5. Each day before you visit, check yourself. If you have symptoms of COVID-19. If you have symptoms, you should self-isolate and follow public health advice about testing. Further advice on what to do is available on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie).
6. If you have symptoms, it is safer not to visit until 2 days after you feel better even if you do not have COVID. You might have flu (influenza) and you could still pass that on;
7. If you are advised to restrict your movements for any reason you should not visit until it is safe to do so;
8. Get some masks and hand sanitiser or hand gel and check that you know how to use them properly- information on hand hygiene is available at <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>. Soap and water works well also if you do not have hand gel;
9. Bring tissues and have a spare mask for the person you visit in case you need it;
10. If there are other items you need like gloves or aprons, check where you can get them and that you know how to use them safely and dispose of them safely when you are finished;
11. Each day before you visit, ask the person you care for check if they have any symptoms that make you think of COVID-19.

## When you visit

1. On arrival, check if the person you care for has symptoms of COVID-19. If they have, check if they need help to contact their GP;
2. People who are severely immunocompromised may benefit from a new treatment provided they get the treatment in the first five days after symptoms start;
3. People aged 65 years or older who have not taken the vaccine and people aged 12 to 64 years who have certain medical conditions and have not taken the vaccine may benefit from a new treatment if they get the treatment in the first five days after symptoms start
4. If you care for someone who is severely immunocompromised or who has not taken the vaccine and is at risk (65 or older OR certain medical conditions) it is important that they talk to their doctor promptly if they have symptoms of COVID-19. The doctor will know if they need testing and if they need to be assessed to see if they need early treatment.
5. Even if they are unlikely to benefit from early, treatment people who are immunocompromised, older people and people with certain medical conditions should have a test if they have symptoms;
6. When you visit some the steps below can help to protect both of you;
7. Keep some distance between you and the person you care for when you can;
8. Clean your hands when you arrive, before you leave, and from time to time while you are there. A step by step guide on hand washing and using alcohol hand rub is available in appendix 1 and 2;
9. If it is possible to do so without causing upset, consider wearing a surgical mask or a respirator mask when you are close the person you care for and if they are able to wear a mask encourage them to do the same;
10. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue and encourage the person you care for to do the same. Discard used tissues into a waste bin immediately after use and clean your hands. If you do not have a tissue, cough into your forearm or the bend of your elbow and clean your hands afterwards;
11. If the weather is OK and you are both comfortable to do so, open the window or doors to help ventilate the house. Check before you leave that the windows and doors are closed if the person you care for is not able to close them or if there is a security risk from the open windows and doors;
12. Laundry can be washed as usual;
13. Cleaning of dishes and cutlery can be done in the usual way;
14. Surfaces that are touched a lot should be cleaned with detergent and water or a detergent wipe.
15. If the person you care for has COVID-19 and you are continuing to care for them you should talk to a doctor or nurse who can tell you about extra precautions you can take.

They may also be able to help you find out where you can get any gloves, aprons, gowns, masks or visors you might need;

16. If the person you care for has COVID-19, monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of COVID 19, and if you develop symptoms you will need to self-isolate and you may need a test;


For more information, you can check out these websites:

1. Further information on COVID-19 is available at
  - a. <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>
2. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 you should self-isolate and contact your GP by phone. Further advice on what to do is available on <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>
  - a. A good resource for family members visiting relatives or neighbours is an information booklet for home help and personal assistants, which is available online:  
<https://www.hpsc.ie/az/microbiologyantimicrobialresistance/infectioncontrolandhai/guidelines/File,13739,en.pdf>
3. Further information on when to wear a face covering is available at: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-coverings-masks-and-covid-19/when-to-wear.html>
4. Further information on how to wash your hands is available at: <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

## Appendix 1

# How to Handwash?

WASH HANDS WHEN VISIBLY SOILED! OTHERWISE, USE HANDRUB

 **Duration of the entire procedure: 40-60 seconds**



0 Wet hands with water;



1 Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces;



2 Rub hands palm to palm;



3 Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa;



4 Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;



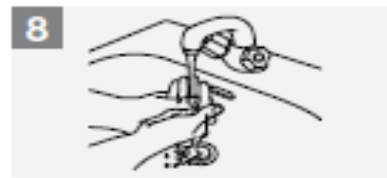
5 Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;



6 Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa;



7 Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa;



8 Rinse hands with water;



9 Dry hands thoroughly with a single use towel;



10 Use towel to turn off faucet;



11 Your hands are now safe.



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May 2009



## Appendix 2

# How to Handrub?

**RUB HANDS FOR HAND HYGIENE! WASH HANDS WHEN VISIBLY SOILED**

**🕒 Duration of the entire procedure: 20-30 seconds**



**1a** Apply a palmful of the product in a cupped hand, covering all surfaces;



**1b**



**2**

Rub hands palm to palm;



**3** Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa;



**4**

Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;



**5**

Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;

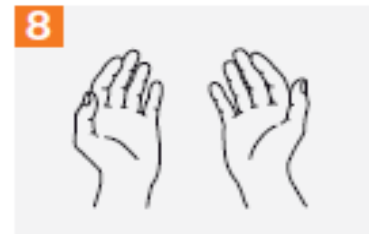


**6** Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa;



**7**

Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa;



**8**

Once dry, your hands are safe.



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