



# COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for family and friends (informal carers) who support people in their own homes

V2.2 07.07.2021

HSE Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control

Version	Date	Changes from previous version
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 symptoms of a viral infection and check with your doctor if you need a test for COVID-19. Stay away until 2 days after you feel better even if your doctor says you do not need a COVID-19 test. Stay away until 2 days after you feel better even if you had a COVID-19 test and the virus was not found. **Stay away when you have symptoms even if you have completed your vaccination**
- 2. Protect yourself** from COVID-19 if you do not catch it you cannot spread it to the person you support and care for
- 3. Get vaccinated** against COVID-19 as soon as vaccine is available to you

**Table of Contents**

Introduction ..... 3

Purpose of document ..... 3

Scope..... 3

Brief background information on COVID-19..... 3

Vaccination..... 4

COVID-19 and Immunity after Recovery..... 5

Before you visit ..... 5

When you visit ..... 6

Appendix 1 ..... 9

Appendix 2 ..... 10

## **Introduction**

Older people and some people other with underlying health conditions are at greater risk of developing severe disease with COVID-19. It is very important to do everything possible to avoid bringing the virus into their home. Some people who are at greater risk may need support in their home like 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 this support is provided by health and social care workers but very often it is provided by family and friends.

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 also 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 on how 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 almost always 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. Generally speaking, 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 top or the

cover of a book or magazine. The virus can survive on surfaces at least for hours. 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 baseline 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. As the months go by it is becoming clearer that the vaccine also helps to reduce the risk that someone can spread the infection to other people.

It is very important to say that vaccines do not provide protection from the day you get your first dose. The protection builds up over time. After two to three weeks you can expect to have some protection but you do not have the full benefit from the vaccine until after you have completed the vaccination course.

The following definition of vaccine protection is used in this document. Individuals are considered to have vaccine protection:

1. 15 days after the 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);

If other vaccines become available the requirement for vaccination will be as advised by HSE.ie.

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

People who have vaccine protection are also less likely to spread infection to other people. If you have vaccine protection and you meet with another person who has vaccine protection (a friend or a healthcare worker) the risk is much lower for both of you. Most frontline healthcare workers have now been vaccinated and rapidly growing number of other people are also vaccinated. If you get vaccinated as soon as you are eligible for vaccination that will help to protect the person you care for.

Even after you have vaccine protection you are advised to stay away from other people if you have symptoms of COVID-19. The vaccine is very good but it is not perfect. Even if you do not have COVID-19 your symptoms could be caused by 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 are not likely to catch it again in the 9 months after they had it. There is a small chance you can catch it again during that time so it is still good to be careful. Even if you already had COVID-19 you are advised to stay away from other people if you have symptoms of COVID-19.

### **Before you visit**

1. Categorisation of very high risk (extremely vulnerable) groups can be found in the following link: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html>
2. If you are caring for someone who is very high risk (extremely vulnerable) of severe disease related to COVID 19, the first step in protecting them is protecting yourself. If you do not catch COVID-19 you cannot give it to them. This means being as careful as you can all of the time to avoid contact with a lot of people, especially indoors. When you do have contact with people keep as much distance as you can, clean your hands and wear a face mask if you cannot keep your distance. Get vaccinated as soon as vaccine is available to you;
3. 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;
4. Each day before you visit, check yourself. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 you should stay home and call your doctor and do not visit until you are told it is safe to do so. Further advice on what to do is available on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie).
5. If you have symptoms it is safer not to visit until 2 days after you feel better. This is the same even if your doctor says you do not need a test for COVID-19 or if you have the test

and the virus is not found on the test. This is true even if you have vaccine protection or if you already had COVID-19. You could still pass on cold and flu symptoms and create concern for the person you care for;

6. If you are advised to restrict your movements for any reason you should not visit until it is safe to do so. You might have to restrict your movements because you have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19, or because you have travelled from another country;
7. If you have travelled from another country follow current guidance on restricting movements. Further information is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b4020-travelling-to-ireland-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.
8. If possible get some hand sanitiser or hand gel and check that you know how to use it 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. Use a surgical mask when you visit them if possible and encourage them to wear a mask. If you do not have surgical masks, use a cloth face covering. However, if you are both fully vaccinated and there is no-one else in the room you do not need to wear a mask or face covering or keep distance;
10. Bring tissues and have a clean spare mask for the person you visit in case you need it;
11. 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;
12. Each day before you visit, ask the person you care for if they have any symptoms that make you think of COVID-19. If you cannot check with them before you visit then check with them as soon as you arrive.

## **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. The GP will decide if they need testing and arrange testing if needed. If you need to stay with the person until care is organised keep as much distance from the person as you can and ask the person to wear a surgical mask. Follow all the other the steps below as carefully as you can. These steps help to protect both of you;
2. Keep some distance between you and the person you care for when you can unless you have both been fully vaccinated and there is no unvaccinated person in the room. If you have both been vaccinated there is generally no need to keep distance if no-one else is present;

3. Clean your hands when you arrive and 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;
4. If it is possible to do so without causing upset, wear a surgical mask when you are close to the person you care for and if they are able to wear a face covering encourage them to do the same. If you both have vaccine protection you do not need to wear masks if no one else is present;
5. If for any reason it is not practical for you to wear a surgical mask you may be able to use a visor. Visors do not provide as much protection as a mask, but they are better than no protection for your face;
6. 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;
7. Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean;
8. 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 ;
9. Normal household laundry practices can be expected to kill the virus that causes COVID-19;
10. Cleaning of dishes and cutlery can be done in the usual way;
11. Surfaces that are touched a lot should be cleaned regularly with detergent and water or a detergent wipe.
12. 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;
13. If the person you care for has COVID-19, you will need to monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of COVID 19, and if you develop symptoms you will need to self-isolate and phone your GP;

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;



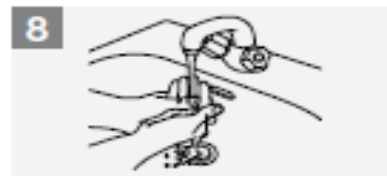
5 Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;



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**



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



Rub hands palm to palm;



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



Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;



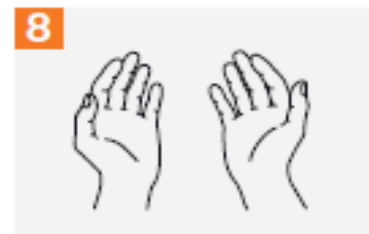
Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;



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



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



Once dry, your hands are safe.



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