

Public Health Measures FAQ

On Tuesday, August 18th, the Government introduced enhanced new measures to reduce the spread of Covid-19 across Ireland. These measures are outlined [here](#). They will be in place until September 13th.

Why are Government introducing these measures at this time?

The latest set of measures were introduced because the number of cases of Covid-19 in Ireland has been increasing steadily over recent weeks.

Our 14-day incidence now stands at over 26.3 per 100,000 population. 12 counties have incidence rates higher than 15 cases per 100,000 population in the past 14 days.

This means Ireland's upward growth rate is currently 3rd highest among EU member states.

An increasing number of clusters of Covid-19 is coming from social and family engagements, sporting activities and workplaces.

The aim of these latest measures is to break the chains of transmission of the virus by reducing the number of people that come into contact with one another.

As in the early days of this pandemic, swift and decisive action is needed to suppress the disease as it surges. This is a collective problem and requires collective action.

How are the measures decided?

Advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) on suppressing Covid-19 is intended to both minimise the risks and to strike the right balance in:

- (i) reducing the congregation of people in uncontrolled settings and settings which provide a focal point for uncontrolled gatherings, and
- (ii) allowing as much of society and business to continue as "normally" as possible while making every effort to suppress the virus.

The advice intends to recognise what parts of society have been most impacted by Covid-19 and to protect certain groups and activities most from the impact of further restrictions.

Based on the above, our priorities include:

- **Supporting the opening of schools and activities for children and young people**
 - The social and emotional development of children and young people has been severely impacted by the restrictions and absence of school, sports

and other activities. This has been well documented by Government in our social impacts' reports.

- **Resumption of more health and social care services**
 - Backlogs in our health and social care services have the potential to create other non-Covid risks to health.
- **Supporting physical activity, some cultural outlets and religious services**
 - Everyone across Ireland has been experiencing mental strain due to the impact of Covid-19. Supporting physical activity, some cultural outlets and religious services is a key response to that.
- **Supporting businesses**
 - We want to support businesses to remain open to the greatest extent possible, so as many people as possible remain in employment. To allow this, we need the support of businesses and employers to implement the guidance fully and strictly to help manage the risks in their sectors.
 - Unfortunately, there are certain areas of the economy which remain closed while we try to manage the existing level of risk and respond to the current trajectory of the disease.

Why are some activities allowed and other similar activities are not allowed under the new measures?

Some activities that are allowed in the public health measures are similar to other activities that are restricted under the measures.

This is because the Government is prioritising activities it believes will have the greatest overall benefit to society and business, while at the same time minimising the risk to the wider community.

This is a whole system approach. We are making choices. That is challenging and complex. More than ever, it requires social solidarity and everyone to play their part.

What Garda powers are being put in place?

All state bodies and actors with responsibility for monitoring, inspection and compliance will intensify activities on an integrated basis to ensure strict adherence to both mandatory and non-mandatory public health measures.

The need for primary legislation to provide extra enforcement powers to An Garda Síochána and other statutory agencies will be urgently considered by the relevant Departments in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General.

Is there a longer-term plan for how to live with Covid-19?

The Government will publish a Roadmap for Resilience and Recovery in advance of September 13.

This will map how we balance public health, economic and social aspects of living with Covid-19 in the short to medium term and try to bring some greater certainty so that society and business can at least plan forward.

It will incorporate NPHET advice in terms of planned stepwise response to the trajectory of the disease. This is subject to ongoing cross-Government consultation and Government consideration prior to finalisation.

Why didn't Government accept other NPHET advice?

NPHET submits recommendations to Government based on the current epidemiological and public health patterns and trends they have monitored in Ireland. These recommendations are then considered, decided on and announced by the Government, with due and careful balance given by Cabinet to wider societal and economic factors.

This has been the case throughout the course of the Pandemic in line with the decision-making framework agreed in the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business.

Will schools reopen?

Yes - schools are vitally important to the social, educational, and physiological development of children, as well as their mental health.

The Government has made it very clear that we are prioritising schools given their importance to the individual child, to children in general, and their families.

We are continuing to work to reduce risk for schools by restricting activities in a wide range of other areas of daily life. The disease is under constant review and Government will continue to be guided by the public health advice.

At all times, the health and safety of our children is our priority.

Significant guidance has been provided to schools to allow for a safe reopening.

The HSE is developing comprehensive guidance on returning to school for parents and teachers. This guidance will be expected to be published early next week.

Why are museums, cinemas, theatres and art galleries and mass allowed to take place with 50 people indoors while sport must continue behind closed doors?

Museums, cinemas, theatres and art galleries are deemed controlled environments and are allowed operate with up to 50 people, but groups must be limited to 6 people from no more than 3 households. Infection prevention and control measures must be in place at these venues, including strict social distancing measures.

Sport is an integral part of our physical and mental health. Sporting events and matches can continue to take place behind closed doors.

The current measures address issues around people gathering before, during and after sporting events. They aim to interrupt the transmission of Covid-19 by reducing the number of people that come into contact with one another.

What are the limits on gyms/leisure centres/swimming pools/exercise and dance studios?

Gyms/leisure centres/swimming pools/exercise and dance studios can remain open with strict distancing and other appropriate protective measures in place.

What are the limits on exercising and training outdoors?

Exercising in groups and training sessions outdoors can continue but must be limited to a group of 15 and have the same consistent group of 15 (with the exception of elite/professional sports and horseracing). There must be no mixing between groups. There is further detail below.

The measures are not about penalising groups who have done great work in organising themselves safely - they are aimed at reducing the risk of transmission of Covid-19. Keeping apart and limiting our social networks is the most effective way to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Can I attend my child's games or training sessions?

Individuals necessary for the safe conduct of a game or a training session can be there.

Parents who need to be there for guardianship purposes or for child protection purposes or for any other purpose related to the safe conduct of the game are permitted. Protocols are being developed by sporting bodies in this regard.

For the next three weeks, please avoid unnecessary congregation beyond essential personnel. We need to limit out interactions and social networks as much as possible.

What does 'Behind Closed Doors' mean?

'Behind Closed Doors' means no spectators, which also reduces the socialising before, during and after sporting events, it eliminates the prospect of people from different households sharing cars and using public transport.

The basis for these recommendations is to reduce the interaction between large groups of people from different households at this time.

Why is outdoors now seemingly being considered more risky than some indoor events (a maximum of 15 outdoors and up to 50 indoors in certain circumstances)

People gathering in groups of any type poses a risk to transmission of Covid-19.

The virus is still in our communities and public health doctors are concerned with the number of cases arising from different households socialising around sporting activity, house parties, other social engagements and car sharing.

Based on this information, current recommendations aim to limit the number of people each of us meets.

They are designed to reduce the level of household, sporting, workplace and close contact transmission we are seeing emerge in Ireland. We need to reduce the numbers we are seeing in these settings, in order to reopen schools safely, continue to resume healthcare services and protect our vulnerable.

Restaurants now have a closing time of 11.30pm. Does that mean last orders occur at 11.30pm or everyone needs to have left the premises by 11.30pm?

Everyone needs to have left the premises by 11.30pm.

Does the closing time restriction apply to weddings?

Yes, if the wedding is taking place in a licensed premises.

Will face coverings for staff in restaurants and pubs and bars operating as restaurants be mandatory?

The Department of Health is preparing regulations to give effect to the Government's decision on mandatory wearing of face coverings for staff in customer facing roles, subject to the views of the Attorney General.

Guidance on the appropriate wearing of face coverings for individuals is available [here](#).

Public Health Measures Outlined for Specific Indoor and Outdoor Gatherings:

The below detailed guidance has been agreed between the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Department of Health.

Sporting

Sporting events and matches can continue to take place behind closed doors.

NGBs and Clubs with competition/events/tournaments planned up to Sept 13 should go ahead as planned, with no spectators and strict public health protocols in place.

Parents/Guardians attending in a safeguarding /supervisory capacity are not classified as a spectator however strict social distancing and public health guidelines should be adhered to at all times. In that context, one parent/guardian per child is permitted to attend at a sporting event, including a game or training session, should they consider it necessary. These provisions will be subject to strict protocols which will be issued in the coming days.

Sport facilities can remain open. Gyms/leisure centres/swimming pools/exercise and dance studios can remain open with strict distancing and other appropriate protective measures in place:

Gyms/pools/indoor exercise and dance classes:

- Total Indoor Gym/Facility Use/Pool Use can remain at previous levels of 50.
- Swimming and indoor water-based activities can be in pods/lanes of 6 once sufficient space is available and strict protocols are in place.
- Indoor Exercise and Dance classes should remain at 6 only as per guidance. However, they may operate multiple pods if sufficient space and strict public health protocols are in place.

Sports training (indoor and outdoor), outdoor exercise and sports summer camps:

- Sports training within indoor facilities can do so in multiple pods of 6 once sufficient space is available and strict public health protocols are in place.
- Outdoor Exercise and Sports training can do so in multiple pods of 15 once sufficient space is available and strict public health protocols are in place.
- Sports Summer Camps can do so in multiple pods of 6 (indoor) and 15 (outdoor) once sufficient space is available and strict public health protocols public are in place.

There should be no mixing between groups.

Individual Safeguarding Ratios will depend on the nature of the activity, the age of the participants and any special needs of the group, Sport Ireland's general guide include 1:8 for under 12 years of age and 1:10 for over 12 years of age. There should be at least one adult of each gender with mixed parties.

Youth Sector

Maximum numbers of up to 15 (12 children plus 2/3 youth workers) engaging in small structured group work, either indoors or outdoors, on a socially distanced basis.

