



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

24 September 2020

Dear Principal,

Many thanks to you all for the hard work undertaken in preparation for schools returning, and for engaging with HSE Public Health colleagues to date, as appropriate.

The COVID-19 Schools Public Health Pathway has proved effective since schools reopened. The Department of Education and the Health Service Executive (HSE) have worked together to review the current pathway, identify opportunities for improvement and streamline the current process.

It is important to note that:

- Not all confirmed cases will require Public Health engagement with school – for example if a case was not determined to be in the school during the infectious period, there may be no actions required within the school setting.
- Departments of Public Health will contact schools where a confirmed case is notified to them that may have implications for the school (e.g. the case was in school during the infectious period and there is a risk of spread in the school setting). This will usually be the same day Departments are notified, but may occasionally be the next day.
- We kindly ask therefore that you await contact from Departments of Public Health, which will occur rapidly if required, before taking any action.
- Even if you are aware, e.g. through a parent, of a confirmed case of COVID-19 that has been within the school setting recently, it should be remembered that the confirmed case is no longer within the school setting, and the risk of onward infection from them has been removed. We also understand from the international literature that onward transmission within school settings is unusual, particularly with good implementation of public health recommendations, including hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and physical distancing.

The Department of Education and HSE have identified a number of improvements which would allow the process to operate more effectively. These improvements do not change any of the advice or direction previously communicated by the Department of Education or Public Health HSE.

The attached FAQs have been developed in light of queries that have been identified since school re-opened.

In the first instance for all schools COVID-19 related queries please see the FAQs (attached) which will hopefully answer most queries.

For other queries call HSELive on 1850 24 1850. This service is open **Monday to Friday: 8am - 8pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm.**

In addition local Public Health Department email addresses and phone numbers are being provided to school Principals (attached). Due to a high volume of calls at present, please only contact your local Public Health Department to alert them to a specific **COVID-19 emergency** related to your school.

These local Public Health Department contact details are for schools only and should not be forwarded to parents.

We are now also asking schools to fill in an excel template with accurate, up to date student and staff information to have in the event of a confirmed case in the school community. This includes names, dates of birth, address and other contact details. If there is a confirmed case or outbreak of COVID-19 in the school community, the HSE's Departments of Public Health and the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) will undertake a Public Health Risk Assessment. As part of the risk assessment, you will be asked questions about the interaction of a confirmed case/cases of COVID-19 with other people in the school setting. This information will facilitate HSE Public Health in identifying the close contacts of the confirmed case(s). You will also be asked about other relevant information, such as the layout of the school and implementation of public health measures in the school (e.g. physical distancing in the school, whether classes split into pods (primary school), whether students/staff were wearing face masks if appropriate (post-primary schools) etc.)

If the MOH decides that COVID-19 testing is required for people in the school community, the information that your school has collated on the excel template will facilitate the HSE to schedule testing appointments. This will ensure a more efficient process.

Legal Basis

Medical Officers of Health (MOH) are Consultants in Public Health Medicine working for the HSE with the statutory responsibility to investigate and control notifiable infectious diseases, including COVID-19. The Infectious Disease Regulations 1981, as amended, provides the legal basis and authority for this activity. The legal basis for sharing requested data with Public Health (MOH) is the [Infectious Diseases Regulations 1981](#) as amended. The Regulations provide the legal responsibility for Public Health in Article 11 and the authority in Article 19. This legislation fulfils [GDPR](#) Article 6 conditions c, d, and e regarding lawfulness of processing, and processing of special categories of personal data is allowed under Article 9 2 (i).

The MOH will request all information deemed necessary following risk assessment – this may include asking the school to provide information included in the excel template, e.g. names and contact details for individuals in pods / classes / or the whole facility. The data template will only be requested by the MOH when deemed necessary following the Public Health risk assessment. The specific format of the information in the excel template will

facilitate efficient referral for testing. The MOH may also request that specific letters or text messages are distributed by you to agreed parents or staff, for example, those identified as close contacts of confirmed cases of COVID-19, to facilitate timely communication of public health action required and what this means for them. HSE Public Health will provide these letters at the time.

All actions requested by the MOH are required under Infectious Diseases Regulations.

Attached to this cover letter is a supporting pack for schools. This supporting pack contains the following:

- The **excel template** to be filled in by the school, with 'how to' instructions detailing how it should be completed.
- A **FAQ leaflet** for the school.
- Contact details for HSE Public Health Departments

Up to date information and advice on COVID-19 is available on hse.ie. If you have any queries you can call HSELive on 1850 24 1850.

Yours sincerely,



Deirdre Shanley

Assistant Secretary

Department of Education