



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

**Office of the Clinical Director of Health Protection, Health Service Executive**

**TO:** All service providers

**FROM:** Dr Abigail Collins, HSE Public Health Schools Response Lead,  
Dr Kevin Kelleher, AND Public Health and Child Health

**RE:** Face Coverings, Covid Testing and key public health messages

**DATE:** 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021

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Many thanks for your continued support to children and families of essential workers and vulnerable communities. Since the start of 2021, Public Health teams have supported the work you are undertaking by responding to cases of Covid-19 notified to us, and undertaking the public health risk assessment and required onward testing. Many thanks for your co-operation with this. The HSE Childcare facilities phone supports you with any queries related to confirmed cases of Covid-19.

**Update on Close Contact Testing:** National Close contact testing recommendations have changed from day 5 testing, to an early test (Day 0) and a day 10 test. These will apply from 10<sup>th</sup> February 2021. If close contacts remain with no symptoms and have a 'not detected' test result from the day 10 test they can finish their restricted movements. If testing is not undertaken, the 14 day restricted movements continue to apply.

Two areas of concern have come to our attention through our engagements with the PHRAs:

- 1) **The use of face-coverings and face-masks**
- 2) **Non-HSE Covid-19 testing**

**1) Face-coverings**

The recommended use of face-coverings and face masks has provided flexibility for staff in the Early Years and child care setting, given the nature of care required particularly for infants and pre-verbal children. However, **at all other times** when not caring directly for children, even within the room staff are providing this care, staff are asked to use face-coverings when a physical distance of 2m cannot, or may not, be maintained. This is particularly important when staff might be talking to one another in a room, moving around the facility e.g. for breaks / cover, or when sitting in designated break areas. Movement and cover within the facility outside of designated 'pods' should be reduced as much as is practicable, and all IPC measures should be maximally implemented by these staff who must move. Clear attention to hand hygiene and the regular cleaning of frequently used touch points are also recommended.

**2) Non-HSE Covid-19 testing**

Testing for Covid-19 is recommended as per the HSE testing criteria. Anyone with symptoms which could be consistent with Covid-19 should self-isolate, contact their GP and Covid-19 testing will be arranged through the HSE services, free of charge. No-one with symptoms of Covid-19 should be

working. Undertaking a test e.g. private antigen test and obtaining a negative result is **not sufficient** to allow a staff member to work. Symptomatic staff should isolate and contact their GPs. A precautionary approach should be taken, such that if a staff member or child is unwell, but may not meet criteria for Covid-19 testing, they should stay home and observe their symptom for 48 hours. Close contacts should restrict their movements, as per national guidelines, and undertake Covid-19 testing, as organised by the HSE.

### **Public Health Messages:**

The Public Health medical schools teams would like to re-enforce the important messages regarding the measures necessary to best protect your facilities and all those attending them.

#### **1) Before attending any facility:**

- **Symptoms** - Please make sure all staff and families are aware not to attend your facility if they have any symptoms of Covid-19 infection.
- **Symptomatic household members** - Please remind all staff and children that no-one should be attending the facility if they have any household member who has signs or symptoms of Covid-19; they should be restricting their movements until it is clear whether the household member has Covid-19 infection or not.
- **Close contacts** - Please remind all staff and children that they need to restrict their movements and undergo testing if they have been told by their doctor / HSE services that they are a close contact of a case of Covid-19; they should not be attending any facility.
- **Returning post travel** - public health advice is that all individuals who have travelled should restrict their movements for 14 days. For travellers from South Africa or Brazil, it is vital that they self-isolate for 14 days post-travel and undertake Covid-19 testing as recommended.
- **Re-enforcing general public health messages** - Please ensure all staff and families attending your facilities are reminded of the importance of keeping your facilities safe by abiding by the national public health measures currently in place at all times e.g. restricting movements and social contacts, social distancing, use of facial coverings and hand hygiene.

#### **2) Within the childcare facility**

- **Mitigation measures** - Please ensure all mitigation measures as recommended by Public Health in the [HPSC guidance](#) are attended to and considered how best to implement within your specific facility. These measures include physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and the use of face-coverings. A recent [webinar](#) was provided for this sector on the infection prevention and control measures, and the public health response. We would **strongly recommend** all staff members view this.
- **Break times** – please continue to ensure all mitigation measures have been maximally adhered to within breaktimes, or when arriving / leaving the facilities. Whilst we appreciate it is difficult to maintain at all times, it is vitally important that processes are in place to facilitate adherence to these measures whilst staff are taking breaks etc e.g. staggering breaks to ensure maximum physical distancing can occur in staff rooms. Ensuring cleaning protocols implemented etc
- **Movements** –essential only movements of staff and children between or across pods is critical to protect from onward spread of infection if a case of Covid-19 within the facility is identified. Ensure staff living or travelling together, work within same pods / rooms where at all possible, to minimise risks of infection if occurs in the household setting.

#### **3) If informed of a case of Covid-19 within your facility**

- Please ring the HSE childcare facilities line if you haven't already heard from Public Health