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PQ 32324/20: To ask the Minister for Health if he will provide a definition of a close contact for the purposes of Covid-19 tracing; if this definition used by the HSE is in line with WHO and ECDC guidelines; if this definition is applied in primary and secondary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Smith,

The HSE HPSC Generic Close contact definition is available on hpsc.ie, is under review and currently states:

- Any individual who has had greater than 15 minutes face-to-face (<2 meters distance*) contact with a case, in any setting.
- Household contacts defined as living or sleeping in the same home, individuals in shared accommodation sharing kitchen or bathroom facilities and sexual partners.
- Healthcare workers, including laboratory workers, who have not worn appropriate PPE or had a breach in PPE during the following exposures to the case:
 - Direct contact with the case (as defined above), their body fluids or their laboratory specimen
 - Present in the same room when an aerosol generating procedure is undertaken on the case.
- Passengers on an aircraft sitting within two seats (in any direction) of the - case, travel companions or persons providing care, and crew members serving in the section of the aircraft where the index case was seated.
- For those contacts who have shared a closed space with a case for longer than two hours, a risk assessment should be undertaken taking into consideration the size of the room, ventilation and the distance from the case. This may include office and school settings and any sort of large conveyance.

*A distance of 1 metre is generally regarded as sufficient to minimize direct exposure to droplets however, for Public Health purposes, a close contact definition of 2 metres has been specified (CDC).

The above is accessible on: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/contacttracingguidance/National%20Interim%20Guidance%20for%20contact%20tracing.pdf>

For educational facilities, the two-hour criteria was reviewed in context of a school day and removed. Please see below definitions extracted from Public Health Guidance on Management of COVID in Educational Facilities, available on: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/casedefinitions/covid-19educationalsettingscasesandclosecontactsdefinitions/>

Case - A confirmed case of Covid-19 notified to the Medical Officers of Health, HSE.

Contact - As per current HPSC close contacts guidelines a clinical Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) will be undertaken for all educational facilities where a confirmed case has attended whilst infectious. It is assumed because of the length of the school day, they will have been within a closed space for at least two hours.

Close contacts definition applied:

- Any person who has had face to face contact for <1m with a confirmed case of Covid-19 for >15 minutes in a school day.
- any person who has been between 1 and 2 metres from a confirmed case of Covid-19 for >15 minutes in a school day with consideration of other mitigation measures e.g. face-covering, pods, ventilation, IPC measures or uncertain compliance with mitigation measures in place (assessed through clinical PHRA)

Contacts are assessed from contact with a confirmed case of Covid-19 during their infectious period - 48 hours before the onset of symptoms if symptomatic, or 24 hours before the test for COVID-19 was taken in those who are asymptomatic.

Additionally, the below outlines points which will be considered when identifying contacts that meet this definition - as part of the PHRA with the case / educational setting. Of note: the determination of close contacts will be following the PHRA and the determination of the Medical Officer of Health.

Outbreaks

For the purposes of defining an outbreak and reporting on the Computerised Infectious Diseases Register (CIDR) - In an educational facility, this is two or more confirmed cases of Covid-19 among students or staff where intra-school transmission is deemed the most likely source of infection following epidemiological investigation for the cases identified. Cases identified within educational facilities that have sources of infection which are most likely

outside of the school setting following the epidemiological investigation, will therefore not be reported as outbreaks through CIDR.

Guidelines and recommendations for schools vary internationally. The above definitions are applied to both Primary and Secondary Schools settings and are adapted from the UK, ECDC and WHO guidance in light of the Irish experience. The CDC and ECDC guidance would likely result in frequent larger scale exclusions of classes. ECDC guidance is currently under review. The UK approach is similar to that currently taken in Ireland, although Ireland undertakes greater testing of close contacts and has recommendations for face-coverings amongst other mitigation measures. Please note HSE HPSC guidance is under constant review also and the national contact tracing guidance is currently being updated. However, the above definitions for educational facilities is not expected to change in the next iteration of HPSC guidance for contact tracing.

Apologies for the delay in answering your PQ.

You may also be interested to know the HPSC publish a weekly report on COVID-19 in all facilities – primary, post primary, special education and childcare on [COVID-19 Schools mass testing reports - HSE.ie](#)

I trust the above answers your query.

Yours sincerely,



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