

Guidance measures for Disability Services in the context of current high levels of Covid 19 transmission rates in the community

**Effective from 5th January 2021
(Guidance revised 3/3/21)**

Introduction:

The purpose of this document is to clarify measures to be undertaken to ensure disability services can continue to operate safely during the current phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. The following underpinning principles should be adhered to by all service providers;

- It is important to emphasise that disability services remains within the category of 'essential services';
- Service providers are respectfully asked not to take unilateral action in terms of service closures; alternatively, each provider must strictly adhere to the following measures under the governance and accountability arrangements of the relevant CHO;
- It is critical that each Service Provider have in place a robust communications plan that ensures each service user and carers/ families have a clear understanding of services to be provided during this current phase.

In terms of specific measures for disability services, the following guidance applies and which is under continuing review and will be guided by contemporary Public Health advice.

1. Residential and home support/ personal assistant services continue to be prioritised and delivered subject to a revised Risk Assessment, Public Health Guidance and direction (inclusive of IPC management procedures).
2. In the context of residential respite service provision, people with complex medical/ clinical related needs¹ to remain at home and receive home support where possible and subject to risk assessment. Residential respite providers to review the risk assessment for each individual. Prioritisation of service to reflect risk assessment and prioritisation criteria should facilitate access, subject to the foregoing. For example, where there are additional requirements associated with behavioural support needs. This principle should be applied / undertaken on a case by case basis and having undertaken a risk assessment.
3. Assessment of need under the Disability Act (and the current scheme to eliminate overdue assessments) continues to be a priority. Attention is drawn to guidance previously provided in terms of conducting remote assessments which can be found as follows;

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/interim-guidance-on-conducting-assessments-in-disability-services.pdf>

¹ Please see <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html> as part of the risk assessment of and consideration in terms of people in higher risk categories and Covid-19.

or via <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

4. In the context of day service provision, the following guidance is applicable from 3rd March;

Revised guidance for disability services was notified on January 5th of this year. Eight weeks have now passed since that guidance has issued and there are some minor adjustments now being notified to take cognisance of the improvement in the activity of the virus and the roll out of the vaccination programme.

- i. Providers to review risk assessment for each individual. Consideration of service user capacity to adopt COVID guidance and IPC protocols should form part of the risk assessment undertaken. In the case of service users with complex medical conditions, it is at the discretion of the service provider through the risk assessment process to decide as to whether it is safe for the service user to attend the day service location. This decision should be taken in conjunction with the service user and their family. Service provision should reflect the risk assessment and prioritisation criteria contained in the guidance issued in August 2020.

(that is; Guidance to support the Framework for the Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services) and which can be found here;

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/guidance-to-support-the-framework-for-resumption-of-adult-disability-day-services.pdf>

or via <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

- ii. Providers to review how they are providing services in locations to ensure reduction in contacts. Hubs/bubbles to be organised where possible with dedicated staff for dedicated service users;
- iii. CHOs and providers are reminded of additional financial supports provided in Qtr 4 (2020) which should facilitate some solutions to additional challenges as a result of the current restrictions; for example, Outreach supports, rent of space, IT equipment;
- iv. Where service users have opted not to return to a day service location at this time, a package of support to be agreed with the family bearing in mind the wishes and needs of the service user and their main carer. Regular contact should be maintained with the service user and their family.