

## Q&A on cocooning prior to cancer surgery or cancer treatment

**Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new virus. We are still learning how it works and this advice is based on current information. See [www.hse.ie/coronavirus](http://www.hse.ie/coronavirus) for further information.**

**These questions and answers may be helpful if you have been recommended to cocoon to reduce your risk of coronavirus, e.g. before an operation.**

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'Cocooning' means staying at home as much as possible and limiting your face-to-face contact with other people. Cocooning helps to prevent people at risk of serious illness from coronavirus (including some people undergoing treatment for cancer) from picking up the virus. This is why you are advised to cocoon for two weeks before your cancer treatment/operation.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can make anyone seriously ill. But the risk of serious illness appears to be higher in certain groups of people, including some people undergoing treatment for cancer. The risk of serious illness appears to be higher if you have coronavirus at the same time as having a major operation, e.g. for the treatment of cancer. This could be the case even if you don't have symptoms of coronavirus at the time of the operation. It is also possible that certain cancer treatments that weaken your immune system may put you at higher risk of serious illness from coronavirus.

Another reason for cocooning before certain procedures, such as surgery, is to reduce the chances of you having coronavirus and then other patients or staff being unintentionally exposed to the virus in the hospital setting.

You may need a test for coronavirus before your treatment and if this shows you have the virus, your treatment or surgery will likely be postponed. No test is 100% accurate, so even if the test does not detect coronavirus this is not a guarantee that you don't have coronavirus. The best way to protect yourself is to follow cocooning advice for the two weeks before your treatment.

### Does cocooning mean that I have to isolate myself from everyone for two weeks?

Cocooning means staying at home as much as possible and limiting your face-to-face contact with other people. This is to reduce your chance of coming into contact with someone who has the virus and picking up the virus from them. You are not a risk to others, you are aiming to protect yourself from infection. Being advised to cocoon does not mean you have to lock yourself away. While you should stay at home as much as possible, it is important not to become isolated from family and friends. You can have visitors to your house and you can go outside and meet people as long as you keep 2 metres away from other people. Follow the advice below in order to limit your contact with other people while cocooning:

- It is extremely important that you avoid contact with anyone who is ill.
- Avoid close contact with other people, keeping 1-2 metres between you and others as much as you can.
- Don't shake hands or share objects that touch your mouth, such as bottles or cups.
- Keep the number of visitors to your house to a minimum. Choose a small social group and try to limit your meetings to these same 6 people and always keep 1-2 metres apart, whether indoors or outdoors.
- Wear a face covering when you meet with anyone indoors and in any situation where it is difficult to maintain social distancing.
- Avoid all crowded places, especially indoors but including parks and public amenities.
- Ask friends or family to go grocery shopping for you. If you choose to go shopping, go during the dedicated shopping hours for people who are cocooning – check these with your local supermarket.
- Work from home if possible.
- Avoid arriving early for appointments to minimise time spent in day wards and waiting rooms.

There is further advice on how to cocoon on the HSE website here:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/cocooning.html#how-to-cocoon>

### Should I be wearing a facemask or face covering?

Face coverings are recommended for everyone to wear if they are in a situation where they cannot stay at least 1-2metres away from other people. Face coverings help prevent people who do not know they have the virus (e.g. because they do not have any symptoms, or they have symptoms but have not been diagnosed with COVID) from spreading it to others. If a distance of 1-2metres between people cannot be maintained, e.g. someone is sharing a car with you, you should both wear a face covering. Face coverings are not recommended for children under 13 years of age.

### How can I cocoon, when I need to care for others?

If you provide assistance to someone outside of your home, see if you can arrange for someone else to help while you are cocooning. There are excellent supports in your community, to help during this time: <https://www2.hse.ie/services/community-support-coronavirus/community-support->

[coronavirus.html](#) You can continue to provide support and companionship remotely or through a socially-distanced visit to a loved one.

If you have responsibility for others within your own home, especially children or a dependent adult, it may not be possible to follow social distancing advice with them at all times. Follow the advice below on extra precautions you can take [within your household](#) to minimise your risk.

Note that children seem to get a milder infection from coronavirus than adults or older people and young children may also be less likely to spread coronavirus to other people. It is still very important to encourage your child to wash their hands regularly and properly, particularly on returning home.

If you are ever concerned that someone you are caring for may have symptoms of coronavirus, contact their GP.

### Can I go to work when I'm cocooning?

If you are cocooning prior to an operation, it is best if you can work from home for the two weeks where possible. Ask your healthcare team for further advice.

If you are cocooning for a longer period while receiving ongoing treatment, it is still best if you can work from home if possible. Ask your healthcare team for advice if you need to work outside the home and feel all the necessary precautions are in place at your workplace and that you can minimise your exposure to others as you travel to/from work.

### What about the others in my house, do they need to take any special precautions?

If you are living with others, follow these steps to reduce your risk of infection:

- Wash your hands well and often and ask the rest of the household to do the same.
- Always cover your cough with a tissue, dispose of the tissue and wash your hands. Ask the rest of the household to do the same.
- If you can, you should use a toilet and bathroom that no one else in the house uses.
- If you cannot have your own toilet and bathroom, the toilet and bathroom you use needs to be kept clean. Another tip is to consider drawing up a rota for using the bathroom, with you using the bathroom first.
- Make sure you use separate towels from the other people in your house, both for drying yourself after bathing or showering and for hand washing.
- If you have one, use a dishwasher to clean and dry used crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them using your usual washing-up liquid and warm water and dry them thoroughly. Do not share cutlery and utensils with other people in your household. When using your own utensils, remember to use a separate tea towel for drying them.
- Clean all surfaces, such as counters, table-tops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets and toilet handles, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables, every day with your usual household cleaning products.

We understand that it will be difficult but you should do your very best to follow this guidance.

Everyone in your household should:

- regularly wash their hands
- avoid touching their face
- clean frequently touched surfaces such as door handles and table tops.

## I've been given a date for my treatment that is less than two weeks away. What will happen now?

If your healthcare team have given you a date that is less than two weeks away, that is okay. Just follow the cocooning advice from today to reduce your risk of coronavirus infection. If you are concerned that you have any symptoms of coronavirus, or have been in contact with anyone with possible coronavirus, let your healthcare team know immediately.

## Will I need a test for COVID before my treatment?

You may need a test for coronavirus before your treatment, even if you have no symptoms. If the test shows you have the virus, your treatment or surgery will likely be postponed. No test is 100% accurate, so even if the test does not detect coronavirus this is not a guarantee that you don't have coronavirus. The best way to protect yourself is to follow cocooning advice for the two weeks before your treatment as recommended by your healthcare team.

If you develop symptoms of possible coronavirus at any stage, you should talk to your doctor. Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, breathing difficulties, high temperature – (generally considered to be over 38°, although people with certain illnesses, including cancer, may develop a temperature that is <38 degrees, or may not develop a high temperature at all, even if they have coronavirus infection – this is because some illnesses affect the body's ability to develop a temperature in response to an infection), loss of sense of smell, loss or change of sense of taste.

## I'm worried about going to the hospital. Could I pick up COVID there?

Your safety is extremely important to us. Every effort is being made to make hospitals as safe as possible, while continuing to ensure patients who need to be seen can still attend for their appointment or procedure. Systems have been put in place to ensure that patients with COVID can be cared for separately from other patients. All staff have been trained in best practice in infection prevention and control. Patients and visitors are advised on how to keep themselves and others safe.

## What happens if I develop COVID when I'm in hospital?

If you develop any symptoms of coronavirus while you are in hospital you should immediately tell a healthcare provider (health care assistant, nurse or doctor). The hospital staff will ensure that appropriate action is taken. This may include offering you a test for coronavirus and ensuring that you are cared for in a separate ward/area to patients who do not have any symptoms of coronavirus – this is to help stop the possibility of the virus spreading to other patients.

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### How can I look after my mental health while cocooning?

Staying at home and reducing contact with other people can be difficult. It may affect your mood and feelings. You may feel low, worried or have problems sleeping. Try to maintain a routine and stay in touch with friends or relatives by phone or on social media. Keep yourself mobile - get up and move around as much as possible. Go for a walk or meet people outdoors, but ensure that you follow the [cocooning advice](#), including keeping a distance of 2 metres between you and other people.

**Together 4 Cancer Concern** is a new support service set up to provide emotional and psychological support to people living with cancer during the coronavirus pandemic. Together 4 Cancer Concern was set up by Cancer Care West, the Irish Cancer Society and the National Cancer Control Programme. If you are struggling with the emotional and psychological effects of living with cancer during this very challenging and uncertain time, you can contact the service through the Irish Cancer Society's Support line on **Freephone 1800 200 700**. Community cancer support centres are continuing to provide services to cancer patients and their families. You can contact a centre local to you for advice and support.

### What if there is an important family event when I am meant to be cocooning?

Attending an important family event while you are cocooning might not be the right option for you and your health. To help you decide whether or not to attend, ask your healthcare team for advice and take their advice into consideration when you use your own judgement about the decision. Remember, the more people at an event, the greater the risk of picking up coronavirus. The following considerations will help to minimise the risk if there is an important event that you choose to attend:

- Ensure that you will be able to maintain strict physical distancing, i.e. strictly adhere to 2 metres physical distance from other people and avoid face-to-face contact
- choose events that are mostly your close family or friend circle who understand your need to adhere to certain protective measures
- wear a face covering
- avoid touching people
- limit the time that you spend at the event to the shortest time possible
- consider whether the event is indoors or outdoors - outdoor events are generally considered safer than indoor events in terms of the risk of infection
- wash your hands regularly during the event and on returning home

### Will I need to continue cocooning after my treatment?

Your healthcare team will advise you on this as it will depend on the type of treatment you received and if you will be attending for further treatment.

Stay up to date, check the [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) - [HSE coronavirus page](#)

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Last updated 31/07/2020 please see [www.hse.ie/coronavirus](http://www.hse.ie/coronavirus)