

**UPDATES TO ADVICE TO INFORM
SAFE
RE-OPENING OF
CANCER SUPPORT CENTRES**

September 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all cancer support centres had to close their physical buildings to patients and their families. Most of them have moved as many of their services as possible online. This includes one-to-one counselling, information and advice, yoga classes, support groups and exercise classes.

Although this has been successful and supportive of cancer patients, it also withdraws many of the supports and social services that people value.

The advice in this document is based on national recommendations current at the time of writing, to inform the safe reopening of support centres in line with the government road map. Of note, current advice should be consulted regularly, to ensure safe delivery of services for staff and clients. It is recommended that regular monitoring of how the centre is coping with the new way of delivering services is completed in case any elements of the policies need to be altered.

This document should be read in conjunction with the '**Return to Work Safely Protocol - COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers**' published on May 8th, 2020

(<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/22829a-return-to-work-safely-protocol/>).

Further up-to-date recommendations from the National Public Health Emergency Team can be accessed at <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

Other sources of current advice which should be consulted are:

- Advice for healthcare professionals is available at www.hpsc.ie
- Advice and resources for the general public at www.hse.ie/coronavirus
- NCCP guidance documents and patient information is available at www.hse.ie/cancer

The following guidance is divided into specific sections –

- Planning before opening,
- Policies and procedures, and
- General control measures.

1. PLANNING BEFORE THE CENTRE IS REOPENED

- Update Health and Safety and Risk Assessment statements for the centre
- Carry out risk assessment at organisational and individual level
- Develop a COVID-19 response plan for your centre if staff or clients are diagnosed with the illness
- Develop plans to mitigate identified risks (with particular focus on common areas such as toilet facilities, waiting areas, kitchen)
- Develop policies for prompt identification and isolation of staff who may have COVID-19
- Identify nominated COVID-19 officer (role may be shared)
- Communicate Health and Safety advice to all staff, contractors and volunteers

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Training for all staff, contractors and volunteers can be accessed on HSEland website by registering as a volunteer (<https://www.hseland.ie/dash/Account/Login>).
 - a) Hand hygiene for clinical staff,
 - b) Breaking the chain of infection,
 - c) Putting on and taking off PPE in community healthcare setting.
- Implement further control measures in line with emerging Public Health guidance.
- Ensure that the centre is prepared with the use of appropriate signage regarding physical distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory hygiene.

3. GENERAL CONTROL MEASURES

(Please see Figure 1 below)

- **Cleaning**

The centre should be cleaned thoroughly before being opened each day. Particular attention should be paid to hard surfaces such as door handles, handrails, any stainless steel or hard plastic surfaces. The kitchen is **only** to be accessed by staff. Any items such as cups, utensils, or glasses must be immediately placed in the dishwasher after use. Appropriate signs should be used to emphasise these points.

- **Toilet Use**

Toilets should be designated for client or staff use. Particular care has to be taken to keep toilets and wash hand basins free of infection. They should be thoroughly cleaned after each use. A staff rota and record should be used to ensure compliance with the cleaning regime.

- **Hand Hygiene**

Hands must be washed using soap and warm water or hand sanitiser. This should occur both before and after any interaction with a client.

- **Respiratory Hygiene**

Please cough or sneeze into your elbow. Dispose of tissues immediately and wash your hands.

- **Physical Distancing**

A physical distance of two metres is to be enforced at all times. This applies to staff and clients. Centre layout should be reviewed to encourage distancing and access to areas controlled, e.g. staff rota for use of kitchen area.

Staff should wear a face mask or covering in situations where it is not possible to maintain a 2 metre distance, either from a client or other staff member. See HPSC website for advice on correct use of a face mask or covering.

All clients will be reminded of physical distancing measures. Face masks or coverings can be made available by the centre for those clients who wish to wear one but it will not be compulsory.

Advice on using face coverings for info:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/ppe/useoffacemasksbythegeneralpublic/>

- **Physical Barriers**

A physical barrier (i.e. a Perspex screen) is to be erected where physical distancing is not possible.

- **Minimise Face-to-Face Contact**

Where possible, continue to support clients remotely through the use of technology. This will be particularly important for those who are in the extremely medically vulnerable categories and are following cocooning recommendations.

- **Use of PPE where required**

This should be in line with HSE guidelines remembering that in all circumstances, good hand hygiene and physical distancing are the key to controlling spread.

- **Limit Numbers On-site**

Every effort should be made to minimise the number of people on site at any one time, this applies to staff and clients. In line with Public Health advice, considerations for staff include staggered rotas and remote working where feasible.

- **Entering the Centre**

Clients should be advised **NOT** to enter the centre if they have any symptoms of possible coronavirus and to contact their GP for advice and assessment. This can be supported by use of signage and/or telephone contact and review before their appointment.

Clients who have been identified as close contacts and asked to restrict their movements for 14 days should **NOT** attend the centre during this time. Attendance by a close contact or a client with COVID-19 should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and after a careful risk assessment and strict infection prevention and control precautions would need to be followed.

Clients should be advised not to arrive too early for appointments, to minimise time spent in the waiting area. If possible, they should wait outside or in their car and be phoned when their consultation is due to commence. On entering, the client should be accompanied to their appointment with the relevant cancer support specialist. Lifts, if available should only be used if absolutely necessary and must be cleaned after each use. A one-way system should operate where possible, where they do not meet any other person.

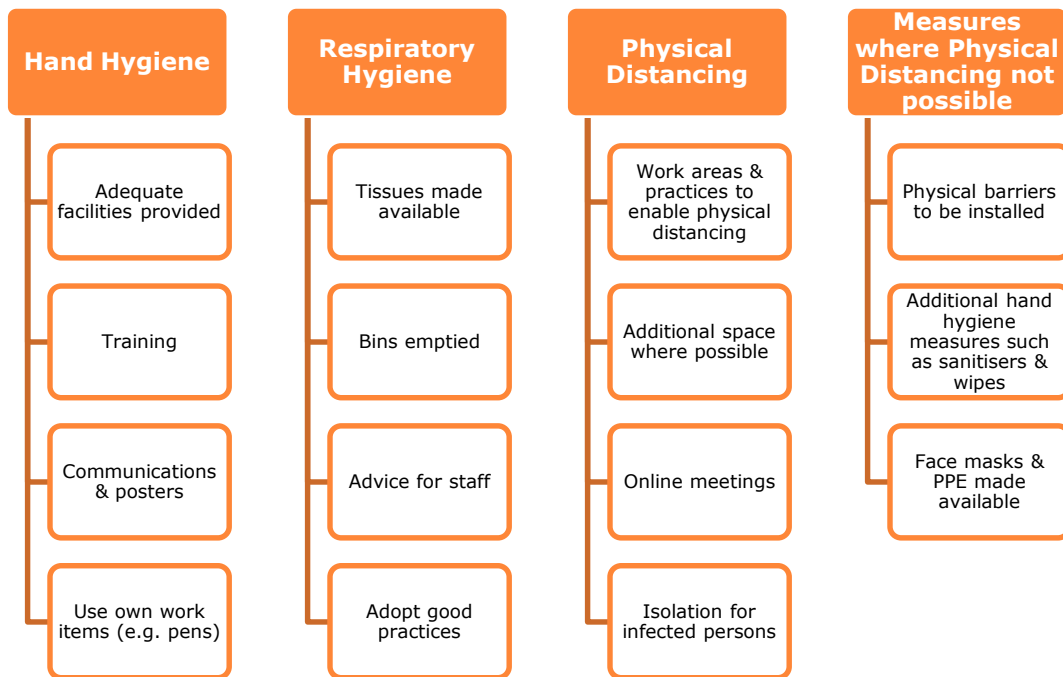


Figure 1 General Control Measures

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CANCER SUPPORT CENTRES

(These should be read in conjunction with the Return to Work Safely protocols)

- **Contract Tracing**

A record should be kept of all visitors to the centre daily with contact details in case there is a confirmed or suspected case of Coronavirus in the centre.

- **Drop-In Service**

It is recommended that drop-in services without an appointment do not operate at present. Any person seeking advice or information regarding living with cancer, should first telephone the centre to arrange an appointment with the appropriate cancer support specialist.

- **Oncology Information & Advice**

If a client requires information or advice, they should be seen in an individual room.

- **Counselling Service**

Counselling services should continue remotely, if possible. **In some cases, this is not advisable particularly with clients who are not comfortable with using the phone or video link.** However, if clients feel the need to visit the centre for counseling services, they should be accompanied directly to the counselling room. The room must be cleaned before and after use.

Therapists should wear a face mask or covering if unable to maintain a 2 metre distance. If further appointments are required, the client should remain in the counselling room while this is scheduled, if possible. Remote counselling services should still be offered where possible. There may be a reduction in the number of appointments available under this new regime.

- **Physiotherapy Service & Physical Rehabilitation Service**

Physiotherapy services should continue remotely where possible. When offering individual physiotherapy treatment, the physiotherapist must follow standard precautions of hand hygiene, gloves and apron if required and wear a surgical face mask, as they will be unable to maintain a 2 metre distance from the client. The client can be offered a face mask to wear if they wish. Where possible, remote support should still be offered. Any equipment used must be thoroughly cleaned before and after use. Therefore, there may be a reduction in the number of appointments available.

- **Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) Service**

Manual Lymphatic Drainage is one of the most necessary 'hands on' therapies. If the centre offers this service, the therapist must follow standard precautions of hand hygiene, gloves and apron if required and wear a surgical face mask, as they will be unable to maintain a 2m distance from the client. The client can be offered a face mask to wear if they wish. The practitioner should operate under the new protocols from the Department of Health.

- **Classes & Groups**

If physical distancing guidelines can be observed and if the room is large enough, classes of **6 including the tutor** could be considered for the centre with remote access available to other participants. Otherwise all groups should be offered online, if possible.

- **Complementary Therapies**

In light of physical distancing requirements, complementary therapy services pose a challenge for cancer support centres. **In light of guidelines issued by the government of Ireland which came into effect on June 29 under Phase 3 of reopening, reflexology and massage services were allowed to recommence services. In relation to cancer support centres, it is advisable that an individual risk assessment be carried out with each client so that both the client and therapist are satisfied that it is safe to offer such services. Please see Appendix 2 for a full list of risk conditions.** Guidance in relation to this will be reviewed following advice from the Department of Health.

Appendix 1

Government information, advice and guidelines:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

Direct link to 'Return to Work Safely Protocol - COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers' published on May 8th, 2020 -

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/22829a-return-to-work-safely-protocol/>

Link to roadmap for reopening society and business -

<https://www.gov.ie/en/news/58bc8b-taoiseach-announces-roadmap-for-reopening-society-and-business-and-u/>

HSE advice for the general public: www.hse.ie/coronavirus

Direct link to advice for people at higher risk, including those cocooning -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html>

National public health and infection prevention and control guidance:

Health Protection and Surveillance Centre - www.hpsc.ie

Link to section on vulnerable groups, including cocooning guidance -

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/vulnerablegroupsguidance/>

Link to advice on face coverings for the general public -

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/ppe/useoffacemasksbythegeneralpublic/>

NCCP guidance documents and patient information:

www.hse.ie/cancer

COVID-19 for cancer patients and their families -

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/news/covid-19.html>

COVID-19 information for health care professionals -

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/profinfo/covid-19.html>

Appendix 2

People at Higher Risk of coronavirus/ COVID-19

(Adapted from HSE.ie <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html>)

There are 2 levels at higher risk:

- Very High risk (also called extremely vulnerable)
- High risk

Very High Risk Group

- This list includes people who:
- Are over 70 years of age – even if you are fit and well
- Have had an organ transplant
- Are undergoing active chemotherapy for cancer
- Are having radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- Have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- Are having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- Have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- Severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, lung fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and severe COPD
- Have a condition that means you have a high risk of getting infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- Are taking medications that mean you are more likely to get infections (high dose steroids or immunosuppression therapies)
- Have a serious heart condition or are pregnant

High Risk Groups

- This list includes people who:
- Are over 60 years of age
- Have a learning disability
- Have a lung condition that is not severe (such as asthma, COPD, emphysema or bronchitis)
- Have heart disease (such as heart failure)
- Have high blood pressure (hypertension)
- Have diabetes
- Have chronic kidney disease

- Have liver disease (such as Hepatitis)
- Have a medical condition that affects your breathing
- Have a weak immune system (immunosuppressed)
- Have a condition affecting your brain or nerves (such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy)
- Have cerebrovascular disease
- Have a problem with your spleen or have had your spleen removed
- Have a condition that means you have a high risk of getting infections (such as HIV, lupus or scleroderma)
- Are taking medications that can affect your immune system (such as low dose steroids)
- Have obesity
- Are residents of nursing homes or long - stay settings
- Are in specialist disability care and are over 50 years of age or have an underlying health problem

Clients should seek the advice of their medical practitioner and obtain advice on attending for services at the centre. With the permission of their Consultant/ G.P and at the discretion of the centre they may attend for psychological support. In such cases, extra precautions should be taken when they attend.

- Client should be seen early in the day or last in the evening to minimize meeting others
- Don't arrange to see the client if you have any COVID 19 symptoms
- Ensure the consultation room is cleaned thoroughly before they attend
- Use usual precautions –hand sanitation, surgical masks, correct coughing and sneezing etiquette
- Try to limit the time of the session within reason
- Inform Infection control co Ordinator/ person in charge that a high-risk client is attending
- Complete visitor contact log on Share Point