



## Guidance on novel coronavirus for workers dealing with the general public

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More information is available on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre website [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie).

There are also posters for display in workplace settings available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/employersguidance/> and

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/infectcont/sth/gl/section-3-app-3-8.pdf>

#### What is the 2019 novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?

A novel (new) virus that has not previously been seen in humans was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. 2019-nCoV is from the same large family of viruses (coronaviruses) that caused the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS).

#### How is 2019-nCoV spread?

The 2019-nCoV can spread from person to person, usually after close contact with a person infected with the virus. The virus can be spread either:

- directly, through contact with an infected person's body fluids (e.g. droplets from coughing or sneezing) or
- indirectly, through contact with surfaces that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and which are, therefore, contaminated with the virus. It is still not known how long the 2019-nCoV virus survives on surfaces, although current information suggests the virus may survive a few hours. Simple household disinfectants can kill the virus.

At present, there isn't enough information to know how easily the virus spreads from person to person. If people with 2019-nCoV are tested and diagnosed in a timely manner and rigorous infection control measures are applied, **the likelihood of ongoing person-to-person spread in public settings in Europe is low**. Systematic implementation of infection prevention and control measures were effective in controlling SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV. One of the best ways to prevent person to person spread of respiratory viruses, including 2019-nCoV, is to use proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette (outlined below).

#### How can I protect myself from getting the 2019-nCoV infection?

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub if your hands are not visibly dirty.

- Practice good respiratory hygiene i.e. when coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – discard tissue immediately into a closed bin and clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Maintain social distancing i.e. leave at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and other people, particularly those who are coughing, sneezing and have a fever.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth – if you touch your eyes, nose or mouth with your contaminated hands, you can transfer the virus from the surface to yourself.

### **Do I need to wear a facemask to protect me from 2019-nCoV?**

For people working with the general public in the community who are feeling well and do not have respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, fever, shortness of breath), facemasks are not recommended because there is no evidence that using masks in this setting is of any benefit in people who are not sick. In line with the WHO guidance, the HSE is not recommending use of facemasks for people in the community setting who are feeling well and do not have symptoms. The most important action that these people can take to protect themselves from 2019-nCoV is regular hand-washing and good respiratory hygiene, as outlined above.

### **My client/customer has recently travelled to Ireland from China. Are there any precautions or actions that I need to take?**

If your client/customer has travelled to Ireland from mainland China (not Hong Kong or Macau) and they are feeling well, they should have already made contact with their local Department of Public Health by phone for advice. Contact details for Departments of Public Health can be found [here](#).

If they remain well, no specific measures are needed. They will be advised by Public Health to watch out for any symptoms of 2019-nCoV for 14 days following their return. The symptoms of 2019-nCoV include cough, temperature and, sometimes breathing difficulties (e.g. shortness of breath).

**For a client/customer with no symptoms, there is no need for them to stay at home or to isolate themselves (i.e. remain separate from other people). There are no restrictions regarding work or any other activities.**

If they develop any symptoms within 14 days of return from mainland China, the person should isolate themselves (i.e. stay separate from other people), and then contact their GP/doctor straight away **by phone** for advice, informing the GP/doctor of their recent travel history. This will be explained to them by their local Department of Public Health. The GP/doctor will advise on the next steps to take, including organising testing for 2019-nCoV if necessary.