



**O' Growney  
National School  
Covid-19  
Return to School  
Plan 2**

**(Term 2 – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021)**

## Underlying Principles

- The school has a responsibility to ensure the safety, health and well-being of all members of our school community – children, parents and staff. This plan has been formulated to better ensure that the school can exercise that duty of care.
- Assuming it is in keeping with public health advice and guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Skills, it is preferable for all children to return to school for all five days of the school week and for a full school day. This plan has been formulated to achieve that aim.
- It is not possible to eliminate the risk of infection. However, with the co-operation of all members of our school community, we will try to minimise the risk of the virus being introduced to school and the consequent risk of its spread.
- This plan has been designed to support the staff and Board of Management in putting measures in place that will prevent the spread of Covid-19 in O’Growney National School.
- The O’Growney National School Covid-19 Return to School Plan 2 details the policies and practices necessary for O’Growney National School to meet the Government’s ‘*Work Safely Protocol*’, the Department of Education and Skills “*Roadmap for the Full Return to School*”. The plan features the same elements and features of the original guidance but is updated to reflect the latest advice issued by Government and National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE).

**The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) have not advised any change in the infection prevention measures in the context of the new variants. However, they emphasise the importance of rigorous adherence by members of the school community to existing measures.**

- **Doing everything practical to avoid the introduction of covid-19 into O’Growney National School.**
- Being aware of what we can all do to protect ourselves and each other
- How to recognise and report the symptoms of Covid-19
- **The need to stay at home if feeling unwell** and inform the school immediately if developing the symptoms of Covid-19
- Continuing to observe social distancing, good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Apply common sense
- Adopting a balance approach

As well as co-operation, the flexibility and goodwill of all will be required to ensure the plan can be implemented.

## Timetables

1. Junior infants to Second Class will return to school at **9.20a.m.** on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2021.  
All other classes, 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Class, will possibly return on Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021.
2. **We strongly emphasise that there should be no congregation outside the school.**  
Parents and children will remain outside the gates socially distancing until school begins. The main school gates will be closed for traffic to facilitate safe assembly of class numbers in these areas.
3. At 9.00a.m.the main side gates will open allowing pupils to enter the school grounds, while maintaining social distancing. On entrance through the main school side gates, **all infants to second class will assemble in designated areas in the car/bus park drop off area.** Children from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> classes will enter the school yard directly. For senior class pupils, our caretaker, Mr. Jimmy Herward has painted distance markings clearly on the school playground, 2 metres apart. If the weather is inclement, children will enter their classes immediately. Children will assemble between 9.00a.m. and 9.10a.m. with classes entering the main building between 9.10a.m. and 9.20a.m. All classes will be in their classrooms by 9.20a.m.
4. To reduce over-congestion, parents/guardians are asked to do the following:
  - not to arrive too early
  - remain in cars as long as possible
  - advise your children to maintain social distance entering and leaving the school grounds
  - we encourage all pupils from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> classes to wear masks when entering and leaving school. These may be removed once in the pupils are in the classroom, under the discretion of the teacher.
  - parents will wear face masks at all times within the school grounds.

**No adults, other than staff members, will be allowed enter the internal school grounds.**

It is important that the resumption of school based teaching and learning and the reopening of school facilities comply with the protocol to minimise the risk to students, staff and others. As the advice issued by NPHEC continues to evolve, this protocol and the measures management and staff need to address may also change.

The “*Return to School Plan 2*” will support the sustainable reopening of our school.

In line with the Work Safely Protocol, the key to a safe and continued return to work, and re-opening of our schools requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the Board of Management, staff, pupils and parents.

This document aims to provide details of:

- **COVID-19 School Policy**
- **Planning and Preparing for Return to School 2**
- **Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative(s)**
- **Safety Statement and Risk Assessment**
- **General advice to prevent the spread of the virus**
- **Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)**
- **Control Measures**
- **Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19**
- **Staff Duties**
- **Covid related absence management**
- **Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

## **O' Growney National School COVID-19 Policy**

This COVID-19 policy outlines our commitment as a school to implement the plan and help prevent the spread of the virus.

### **COVID 19 Policy Statement**

O'Growney National School is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our pupils. To ensure that, we have developed the following COVID- 19 Response Plan. The BOM and all school staff are responsible for the implementation of this plan and a combined effort will help contain the spread of the virus. We will:

- continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff
- provide up to date information to our staff and pupils on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct hand-washing techniques
- agree with staff, a worker representative who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan in relation to summer provision
- inform all staff and pupils of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
- adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the guidance and direction of the Department of Education and Skills
- keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
- ensure staff and pupils engage with the induction / familiarization briefing provided by the Department of Education and Skills
- implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
- provide instructions for staff and pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
- implement cleaning in line with Department of Education and Skills advice

All school staff will be consulted on an ongoing basis and feedback is encouraged on any concerns, issues or suggestions. This can be done through the Lead Worker Representative

This **Covid-19 Return to School Plan 2** was approved by the Board of Management on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2021

### **Planning and Preparing for Return to School**

The Board of Management aims to facilitate the resumption of school based teaching and learning and the return to the workplace of staff and pupils on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2021. The return to the work must be done safely and in strict adherence to the advice and instructions of public health authorities and the Government.

Details for the reopening of the school facility and the applicable controls are outlined in this document.

## Signage

Schools will be required to display signage outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene.

## Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a new Return to Work (RTW) Form. A hard copy will be available from the secretary's office.

**A RTW form should only be completed at least 3 days prior to any proposed date of return to the workplace.**

## Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative

Responsibility for the development and implementation of the Covid-19 "*Return to School Plan*" and the associated control measures lies primarily with the Board of Management and the School Leadership.

The Lead Worker Representative, Mrs. Sinead Skelly, will carry out the following specific role.

The Lead Worker Representative, Mrs. Sinead Skelly, is to ensure that Covid-19 measures are adhered to in the workplace as follows:

- Work collaboratively with the employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19.
- Promote good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette along with maintaining social distancing in accordance with public health advice.
- Assist with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Make representations on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.

If a staff member has any concerns or observations in relation to the Covid-19 "*Return to School Plan 2*" and control measures or the adherence to such control measures by staff, parents/guardians, contractors or visitors, he/she should contact the lead worker(s) who will engage with the Principal/BOM.

<b>Name of Lead Worker representative:</b>	<b>Contact details</b>
Mrs. Sinead Skelly	O'Growney National School { 046- 9432291 }

All staff, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors have a responsibility both as individuals and collectively to have due regard for their own health and safety and that of others and to assist with the implementation of the Covid-19 "*Return to School Plan 2*" and associated control measures.

## Safety Statement and Risk Assessment

COVID-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. A risk assessment to identify the control measures required to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 in school settings has been conducted and will be continued to be adhered to.

## **General advice to prevent the spread of the virus**

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 it is important to know and recognise the symptoms. They are:

- ✓ High temperature
- ✓ Cough
- ✓ Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- ✓ Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste
- ✓ Sore Throat
- ✓ Fatigue

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a school is to minimise the risk of introduction of the disease into the school setting in the first place.

This can be achieved through the following measures:

- Promote awareness of COVID-19 and its symptoms amongst staff, pupils, parents and visitors.
- Advise staff and parents of pupils who have symptoms of COVID-19 or other acute infectious diseases not to attend school, to phone their GP and follow the HSE guidance on self-isolation.
- Advise staff and parents of pupils who have been identified by the HSE as contact of a person with COVID-19 not to attend schools and to follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement.
- Ensure that staff and pupils know what to do if they develop symptoms at school.
- Everyone entering the school building should be required to perform hand hygiene with hand sanitiser.
- **Visitors to school during the day should be by prior arrangement** and should be received at a specific contact point.

## **Managing the risk of spread of COVID-19**

### **Wash your hands frequently**

Regular hand washing with soap and water is effective for the removal of COVID-19.

### **Hand Hygiene and Hand Sanitisers**

Hand hygiene can also be achieved by the use of a hand sanitiser (when hands are clean). Hand sanitisers are readily deployed in school settings to avoid disruption to teaching and learning and to avoid congestion of staff and pupils waiting to use hand washing facilities.

### **Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth**

Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth.

### **Physical distancing**

Physical distancing of 2 metres is recommended to reduce the spread of infection in the workplace.

## Practice of respiratory hygiene

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.

**Good hygiene practices and washing your hands properly and regularly can help stop the spread of the virus. It is, therefore, crucial that all staff adhere to this advice and adopt the following practices as strictly as possible.**

### Do

- Wash your hands properly and often
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

### Do Not

- Touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
- Share objects that touch your mouth – for example, bottles, cups, cutlery.

## High risk groups

The list of people in high risk groups includes people who:

- are over 60 years of age
- have a learning disability
- have a lung condition that's 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 can affect your breathing
- have cancer
- have a [weak immune system \(immunosuppressed\)](#)
- have cerebrovascular disease
- have a condition affecting your brain or nerves (such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis, or cerebral palsy)
- 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 medicine that can affect your immune system \(such as low doses of steroids\)](#)
- have [obesity](#)
- are residents of nursing homes and other long-stay settings
- are in specialist disability care and are over 50 years of age or have an underlying health problem

## Control Measures

A range of essential control measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of the spread of Covid-19 virus and to protect the safety, health and welfare of staff, pupils, parents/guardians and visitors as far as possible within the school. These control measures are outlined in this document. It is critical that staff, pupils, parents/guardians and visitors are aware of, and adhere to, the control measures outlined and that they fully cooperate with all health and safety requirements.

Staff, in particular, should note that they have a legal obligation under Section 13 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to comply with health and safety requirements and to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves, their colleagues and other parties within the workplace.

The following control measures have been put in place:

### **i. Return to Work Form**

Staff are required to complete a new RTW form at least 3 days prior to any return to the school facility,

### **ii. Induction Training**

All staff have undertaken Covid-19 Induction Training prior to returning to the school building. New practices and knowledge regarding:

- Latest up to-date advice and guidance on public health
- Latest Covid-19 symptoms from the variants
- What to do if a staff member or pupil develops symptoms of Covid-19 while at school
- Outline of the Covid-19 “*Return to School Plan 2*”

### **iii. Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette**

It is crucial that all staff, pupils, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors are familiar with, and adopt, good hand and respiratory hygiene practices.

**Handwashing facilities and/or hand sanitisers are available at multiple locations within the school facility and in each classroom.**

### **iv. Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

PPE will not be required to be worn within the school facility according to current occupational and public health guidance. However, for a limited number of staff, PPE will need to be used occasionally or constantly due to the nature of certain work activities or work areas.

Such include roles where:

- Performing intimate care
- Where a suspected case of Covid-19 is identified while the school is in operation

Appropriate PPE is available for dealing with suspected COVID-19 cases, intimate care needs and for first aid.

#### **v. Cleaning**

Regular and thorough cleaning of communal areas and frequently touched surfaces will take place, in particular, toilets, lift, door handles and staffrooms. Cleaning will be performed regularly.

All staff are required to maintain cleanliness of their own work area.

**Staff should thoroughly clean and disinfect their work area before and after use each day.**

**Staff must use and clean their own equipment and utensils (cup, cutlery, plate etc.).**

#### **vi. Access to the school building / contact log**

Access to the school facility will be in line with agreed school procedures. Arrangement for necessary visitors such as contractors and parents/guardians will be restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained prior approval from the Principal.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in restricting the spread of the virus and protecting the health and safety of the individuals themselves and other staff, contractors and visitors at the workplace.

**A detailed sign in/sign out log of those entering the school facilities is maintained.**

#### **vii. First Aid/emergency procedure**

The standard First Aid/Emergency procedures shall continue to apply in O'Growney National School.

### **Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19**

**Under no circumstances should a pupil attend school if displaying any symptoms of Covid-19.** It is vital that you keep your child at home, monitor the symptoms and immediately contact your G.P. if you suspect that your child has contracted Covid-19. Please contact the school as soon as possible if your child or any member of your family is going for testing.

**Please Note: If a pupil is displaying any symptoms of Covid -19 he/she will be sent home immediately. Please ensure all your contact details are updated. If coming to collect a suspected case please ensure you take all precautions leaving the school grounds.**

The following outlines how O'Growney National School will deal with a suspected case that may arise during the school day.

**Staff or pupils should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of Covid-19.** The following outlines how O'Growney National School will deal with a suspected case that may arise during the school day. **A designated isolation area has been identified within the school building.** {Room 29}. The possibility of having more than one person displaying signs of Covid-19 is considered and a contingency plan for dealing with additional cases is in place. The designated isolation area is behind a closed door and away from other staff and pupils.

If a staff member/pupil displays symptoms of Covid-19 while at work in O'Growney National School the following are the procedures which will be implemented:

## **Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19 in O'Growney National School**

- If the person with the suspected case is a pupil, the parents/guardians will be contacted immediately.
- The person will be isolated and a procedure is in place to accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2 metres away from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from the symptomatic person at all times.
- A mask will be provided for the person presenting with symptoms. He/she will wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises.
- The individual who is displaying symptoms will be assessed whether he/she can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by parents and call their doctor and continue self-isolation at home.
- The person presenting with symptoms will be facilitated to remain in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and the school will facilitate them calling their doctor. The individual should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects. Advice will be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and the tissue will be put in the waste bag provided.
- If the person is well enough to go home, it will be arranged for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and advise them to inform their general practitioner by phone of their symptoms.
- If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is a Covid-19 suspect.
- Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery
- If the pupil is very unwell, parents will be asked to drive in the side gate of the school yard to a discrete area where the child may be collected.

### ***Children who should not attend school***

If your child is in one of the following categories, they should not attend school –

- **Children who have been diagnosed with Covid-19**
- **Children who have been in close contact with a person who has been diagnosed with Covid-19**
- **Children who have a suspected case of Covid-19 and the outcome of the test is pending**
- **Children who have been in contact with a person who has a suspected case of Covid-19 and the outcome of the test is pending**
- **Children with underlying health conditions, who have been directed by a medical professional not to attend school**
- **We request that children who return from travel abroad should not attend school within 14 days of their return.**

### **Children in High Risk Groups:**

Parents should seek advice from their G.P./Specialist about returning to school, if they think their child is in a high risk group.

### **Use of Face masks:**

It is currently not recommended in Ireland for children under 13 to wear face masks as a mitigation strategy against the transmission of the coronavirus. If a parent wishes their child to wear a mask, this will be permitted.

## Collection of Children during the School Day

If a child has to be collected during the course of the school day, the following arrangements will apply:

- When the adult arrives at the school, they should phone the office and then use the intercom at the front door of the school to alert the office that they have arrived.
- **No adult should enter the school building, at any time, unless permission has been given to do so.**
- Access will only be permitted once their temperature has been taken and they have used the hand sanitiser. Masks must be worn at all times.
- If having to enter the internal premises, the adult will be asked to fill in a visitor's log for tracing purposes.
- The secretary, Mrs. Rebecca Flynn, will sign all children out.
- The child will be brought from their class to the exit in the school foyer, by a member of staff.

## Other Responsibilities for Parents

- Parents must ensure that all of the child's equipment/books/copies are labelled with the child's name, as equipment/books cannot be shared.
- Parents are to ensure that their child knows and uses the protocols around coughing/sneezing/use of tissues/hand sanitisers.
- Parents must ensure that all books/writing equipment/lunch boxes/water bottles are sanitised on completion of homework before being placed in the child's school bag.
- Water bottles are to be filled at home every evening.
- Where practicable, pencils to be pared at home and copies ruled.
- Children are to go to the bathroom and wash their hands **before** leaving for school.

It is recommended that children have a pencil case stocked with all their stationary needs as sharing of resources is not permitted. It is recommended that children have a second pencil case to use while at home.

## Uniforms:

Children's uniforms (including tracksuits) must be clean and washed regularly. In light of the difficulties this may cause, Tuesdays and Thursdays will be "tracksuit only day for all pupils", which will allow washing of both school uniforms and tracksuits on alternate days.

**P.E. for all classes will be conducted on either on Tuesday or Thursday.**

It is more important that all clothing be clearly labelled, as the "**Lost and Found**" area cannot be facilitated. Uniforms or tracksuits should be taken off straight after the child arrives home from school for the day. They should *not* be worn in any after-school facilities, shops or activities etc.

## Lunches

Parents/guardians are asked to make sure that children bring their lunches to school to avoid adults having to come to the school during the day.

**Dropping in lunches will not be permitted.** Please remind your children not to share their food or drinks with other children.

## Personal Equipment

In so far as possible, it is requested that all pupils bring their own pens, pencils, colours, rubbers, etc., to school in their own pencil case to avoid the sharing of equipment.

It is further requested that all items have the child's name on them for ease of identification.

## Yard

Break times will be staggered. Only four classes will be outside during any break and each class will have a designated area to play in. No classes will mix.

## Shared Equipment

No sharing of classroom equipment will take place such as tablets, laptops, music or P.E. and the equipment used for structured activities and play in Infant classrooms.

## Doors and Windows

Where practical, all internal doors will be left open to ventilate the building and to minimise hand contact with common surfaces.

To ensure that classrooms are well ventilated, windows will be kept open, as often as possible, and will be opened while children are taking all breaks in the playground.

## Office

- We have an online payment system that minimises the amount of cash that needs to be handled.
- Parents/Guardians are asked to co-operate in helping to keep school staff safe by arranging for online payments through the Aladdin app.
- Children will not be sent to the Secretary's Office or to the Reception area to deliver messages.
- As far as possible, staff members will not enter the Office area.

## Photocopying.

Photocopying will be kept to a minimum. Any staff member who uses the photocopier should clean it down after use with the wipes provided. **Children will not be allowed to use the photocopier.**

## Special Education Support

- In keeping with our Special Education policy, support will be provided to ensure our support teachers will work within the confines of a bubble.
- Withdrawal Support: Where children receive support in one of the SET rooms, social distancing of 2 metres will be maintained between each child in the group.
- The tables and chairs in SET rooms will be wiped clean in between different groups attending

## P.P.E. Equipment

While it is not envisaged that PPE will be worn by staff in general, staff who are attending to particular care needs, dealing with suspected COVID-19 cases or who are administering first aid will wear appropriate PPE including gloves, face masks and face shields.

## P.E.

Where possible, P.E. will take place outdoors and the use of equipment will not be permitted. P.E. will only take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

## Staffroom

- All staff members should maintain a physical distance of 2 metres when they are not engaged in teaching e.g. when they are using the staff room and arriving/leaving work.
- Face coverings should be worn at all times entering and leaving the staffroom.
- Hands are to be sanitised before using fridge handles, microwaves etc.
- Staff members should bring their own cups, bottles, cutlery, etc. to school and avoid sharing utensils in the staffroom, as far as possible.
- Staff meetings will be held in the P.E. hall with social distance of 2 metres.

# Staff Duties

Staff have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties. In order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adhere to the School Covid-19 “*Return to School Plan 2*” and the control measures outlined. The cooperation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of Covid-19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play.
- Coordinate and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained.
- Make themselves aware of the symptoms of Covid-19 and monitor their own wellbeing.
- Self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of Covid-19.
- Not return or attend school if they have symptoms of Covid-19 under any circumstances.
- If they develop any symptoms of Covid-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above.
- Complete the RTW form before they return to work.
- Inform the Principal if there are any other circumstances relating to Covid-19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace.
- Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices.
- Keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

## **Covid related absence management**

The management of a Covid-19 related absence will be managed in line with agreed procedures with D.E.S.

## **Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

The Board of Management aims to protect and support the health and wellbeing of all staff (physical, mental, spiritual etc.) both at work, whether in the school facility or at home and outside of work. The Board of Management is mindful that the support and promotion of staff health and wellbeing is particularly important in the current context where the Covid-19 pandemic has caused considerable challenges for, and disruption to, people’s personal, family and social lives as well as their work arrangements.

The Board of Management aims to foster a culture and work environment that support healthy behaviours and staff wellbeing and shall continue to make health and wellbeing tools and guidance available to staff as well as organising suitable support programmes, initiatives and events.

These are challenging times for everyone. Should a staff member experience any stress or anxiety in respect of work or work arrangements, he/she should feel free to speak to the Principal.

# Useful Information

## Transmission

Like other respiratory viruses, the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 occurs mainly through respiratory droplets generated from the mouth and nose of an infected person during activities such as coughing, sneezing, talking or laughing. The droplets may carry virus directly to the mouth, nose and eyes of person standing nearby or may land on a nearby surface. Under certain circumstances, airborne transmission may occur (such as when aerosol generating procedures are conducted in health care settings or potentially, in indoor crowded poorly ventilated settings elsewhere).

In general, higher levels of virus are present around the time of first onset of symptoms. Some people who never notice any symptoms may be infectious to others (asymptomatic transmission). Recognising infection is likely to be more difficult in people who are not able to describe their symptoms or communicate easily that they feel unwell however parents, SNAs, teachers and others who are very familiar with the baseline function of a child or young person may notice changes that suggest infection and may warrant medical assessment.

Virus can remain on the surface for some time and be transferred to the mouth, nose and eyes of another person on their hands after they touch the contaminated surface. The virus does not penetrate through the skin.

## Survival in the environment

Virus on surfaces is easily removed or with common household cleaning products (detergent) and in those circumstances where disinfection is needed common bleach and a number of other disinfectants are effective

## Duration of Infectivity

People may be infectious for up to two days before they develop symptoms (pre-symptomatic transmission). In Ireland, people with COVID-19 are generally considered infectious for up to 10 days after the date of onset of symptoms or for 10 days after the date of their first positive test if the date of onset of symptoms is not clear. A longer period may apply to people who were hospitalised with COVID-19. After 10 days, the person is no longer considered infectious if they have been free of fever for 5 days. Doing another test at the end of the ten days is usually not useful and should only be done if specifically requested by a doctor.

## Practical Measures for Harm Reduction Related to COVID-19 when addressing Additional Care Needs in the educational Setting

The following practical measures for preventing harm related to COVID-19 when addressing additional care needs in the education setting are organised under 3 main headings, reducing the risk of introduction of COVID-19, reducing the risk of spread of COVID-19 and reducing the impact of COVID-19 infection if it occurs.

# Reducing the risk of introduction of COVID-19 into the Educational Setting

The virus that causes COVID-19 cannot spread in any setting unless it is introduced. Although there is significant anxiety about introduction of virus on objects in practice the virus is essentially always introduced by a person who is infectious and is shedding the virus. Although some people with no signs or symptoms can be infectious, people are generally most infectious for others when they have symptoms and signs of infection.

1. School staff should be familiar with the main symptoms and signs of COVID-19 (see above) so that they may be able to recognise if a pupil develops obvious signs of infection.
2. Pupils (as appropriate to their ability) their parents, guardians and families should be informed of the main symptoms and signs of COVID-19 (see above) so that they may be able to recognise if a pupil develops obvious signs of infection.
3. School staff as well as pupils (as appropriate to their ability), their parents, guardians and families should be aware that they must not attend school or training if they have symptoms or signs that may suggest COVID-19 until they have taken appropriate medical advice and testing if appropriate. They should be aware that they should not attend school or training if they have been told they are close contacts of a person with COVID-19. These messages should be reinforced regularly.
4. School staff as well as pupils (as appropriate to their ability), their parents, guardians and families should be aware of the general advice they should follow outside of the educational setting to lower the risk that they become infected with COVID-19.
5. Limiting the number of people entering the educational/training setting to those essential to provide the service reduces risk of introduction of the virus.

Staff should be alert for any signs of illness that suggest that they, a pupil or a colleague may have COVID-19 on arrival for school and throughout the day.

# Reducing the risk of spread of COVID-19 in the Educational Setting

If the virus is introduced into an educational setting, the highest risk of spread is related to close contact with an infectious person or their immediate surroundings. Therefore the most important measures to reduce the risk of spread are doing all that is practical to limit the degree to which different groups of people within the education/training setting mix and interact with other groups. This is especially the case indoors.

It is recognised that there are practical considerations that must be taken into account when it is necessary for an SNA to support multiple students across different settings in the course of a working day. It is also the case that some children will need to move from their special class into a mainstream class during the day to ensure that their integration needs for educational purposes are addressed. As below, where movement is necessary the risk can be reduced by hygiene measures.

The risk of spread can also be reduced to some degree by the highest practical standard of personal and environmental hygiene. In the context of COVID-19, the risk is associated with droplets and fluids from the respiratory tract. There is very little risk of spread of COVID-19 from other body fluids (such as urine and faeces) although they may carry other infectious microorganisms.

## **Reducing Mixing Between Groups**

1. To the greatest degree that is practical in the context of the educational and care needs of the pupils groups/classes should avoid mixing with other groups particularly indoors.
2. SNA should support the smallest number of pupils that is practical (a pod of pupils) and should move between pods as little as is practical to do so recognising that flexibility is sometime essential to manage absence due to leave or illness.
3. If movement between pods/classes is necessary SNAs should move between the least possible number of pods/classes on any given day.
4. If members of discrete pods/classes assemble in one area for meals or other activities maintain as much distance as is practical between the pods/classes and manage entry and exit to reduce interaction between members of different pods/classes as much as is practical.

## **Promoting Key-Behaviours that Reduces risk of Person to Person Spread**

1. Promote hand hygiene for staff and pupils particularly on boarding a bus if there is shared transport, on arrival at the school/centre each day, prior to departure, before meals and after any contact with the pupil that is likely to have resulted in contact with oral or nasal fluid.
2. There should be ready access to hand sanitiser in all educational settings with due regard in relation to placement to avoid the risk of ingestion by pupils. Please note also that alcohol based hand rub is flammable and needs to be kept away from naked flame.
3. Providing SNAs with personal pocket size dispensers of alcohol hand gel may be useful, particularly if wall mounted dispensers are not a safe option in a particular context and also for use during outdoor activities.
4. Promote respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette to the greatest extent possible.
5. Support in performing hand hygiene should be provided to pupils who need assistance.
6. Limit sharing of items between members of the pod in so far as is practical especially with respect to items that pupils may put in their mouth.

## **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

1. Personal protective equipment in the setting of COVID refers to items that are used to reduce the risk of infection in particular settings.
2. PPE can be of value as an addition to all the other measures outlined here to reduce the risk of infection for SNAs.
3. As with all children, pupils with additional care needs should not be required to wear a face covering if they are under 13 years of age. Those who choose to wear a face covering may do so.
4. Pupils with additional care needs who are 13 years or older should not be required to wear a face covering if the face covering causes distress or is a barrier to their education and care needs.
5. In this context and in association with other measures specified the use of a face covering should be routine for SNAs in accordance with Government guidance.

6. When SNAs are within 2m of a pupil and to whom they are delivering personal care or attention for a period of time the face covering should normally be a surgical mask.
7. If surgical mask are not available a cloth face covering should be used. If for any reason use of a surgical mask or cloth face covering is not practical for any reason, they should use a visor of a quality suitable for use in a healthcare setting however HPSC advice is that a visor does not provide protection equivalent to a mask.
8. Mask and visors should be donned and doffed and disposed of as demonstrated in videos available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/ppe/>. Masks should be removed and disposed of if they are wet or damaged. Masks should be removed and disposed of if going on a break or visiting the toilet.
9. Gloves and aprons should not be used routinely in the educational setting.
10. If providing care that involves specific risk of exposure to blood or body fluids (oral fluids, faeces, urine) use of gloves and a disposable plastic apron is appropriate. These must be removed and disposed of safely and hand hygiene performed after caring for each individual. Note with respect to faeces and urine the risk of infection is related to other infectious organisms rather than COVID-19.
11. Hand hygiene should be performed before donning and after removing gloves.
12. If providing care that involves a risk of splashing of body fluids a visor is required to protect the eyes from splashing even if already wearing a surgical mask.
13. Used PPE is generally discarded directly into domestic waste.

PPE used when attending to a person with suspected COVID-19 while waiting for collection can be placed in a separate plastic bag, which is then placed in domestic waste.

## **Environment and cleaning**

1. The educational environment should provide discrete rooms for each group to the greatest degree practical and be as spacious as is practical with as much natural ventilation as practical.
2. Surfaces should be easy to clean.
3. Outdoor activity is associated with lower risk and should be encouraged where appropriate and weather permits.
4. The highest practical standards of general hygiene should be maintained.
5. The floors, tables, chairs and other items should be easily cleanable and cleaned at least daily.

Cleaning is generally with water and detergent or detergent wipes. If disinfection is required in specific circumstances then this is always in addition to and never instead of cleaning.