



Guidance to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 infection in pharmacies

v1.0, 16.03.2020

This guidance is based on what is currently known about COVID-19. It is intended for use during the delay phase and may change. The goal is to reduce the harm caused by the spread of the virus in Ireland. It replaces Interim guidance for management of individuals with suspected COVID-19 infection presenting to pharmacies V1.0 10.03.2020. Up to date information for the public: www.hse.ie/coronavirus

Up to date information for healthcare professionals and health services, including algorithms: www.hpsc.ie

Pharmacies and pharmacists play a key role in supporting public health and in particular are recognised as a valuable resource for members of the public who are seeking reassurance and information. Under normal circumstances pharmacists are often the first point of contact for those with mild respiratory symptoms although at the present time this is less likely as members of the public are being advised to use specific pathways to access care and testing if appropriate. Pharmacists may also have contact with patients with respiratory tract infection who have come to have prescriptions filled.

COVID-19 may spread in either direction from a healthcare worker to a patient or from a patient to a healthcare worker. Good infection prevention and control practice seeks to manage both of these risks in a rational way that respects to dignity and safety of both patient and healthcare worker

Key principles to prevent the spread of COVID-19 include;

- Ensuring measures are in place to minimise chance for exposure
- Promotion of physical separation, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and hand hygiene
- Keeping up to date with information available from www.hpsc.ie and www.hse.ie

Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19 infection)

Like other respiratory viruses, the virus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19 is transmitted if the virus reaches the mucosa of the respiratory tract or eyes. The virus can reach the respiratory tract if an infected person coughs or sneezes when close to another person and the droplets from the cough or sneeze land in the eye, nose or mouth or when contaminated hands touch the eyes nose or mouth. If a healthcare worker can maintain a

distance of 1 metre from the patient's mouth and nose, they are not within the likely range of droplet transmission. This helps protect both.

General Preventative Measures

General precautions you can take to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses are to;

- Do not attend for work if you have symptoms of respiratory virus infection.
- Clean your hands regularly using an alcohol-based hand rub (if hands are not visibly soiled) or by washing with soap and water.
- Keep your distance when possible from all people in the pharmacy, leaving a distance of at least 1 metre* (3 feet) between yourself and others.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth,
- Observe and encourage other to observe respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette for example when coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Discard the tissue immediately into a closed bin and clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water. If you do not have a tissue cough into your upper arm or the crook of your elbow -do not cough into your hand.
- **Please note that facemasks or gloves or other personal protective equipment are not worn for performing routine work in community settings.** Wearing surgical masks or gloves when they are not indicated can create a false sense of security and distract from other essential preventive measures such as hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.

** Note that although a distance of 1m is generally regarded as sufficient to minimise direct exposure to droplets the current public health case definition of a "close contact" for COVID-19 refers to a distance of 2m therefore it is preferable to increase the distance beyond 1m where this is practical*

Measures to minimise chance for exposure

Public messaging

- People who have fever and/or a cough, who have confirmed COVID-19 infection, or are awaiting testing or test results, or have been advised to self-isolate should not attend the pharmacy.

- People who are in at risk groups for severe complications of COVID-19 should minimise public contact of all kinds including going to the pharmacy where possible.
- If people in either of these categories have concerns or questions about their medicines or require a supply of prescription or over the counter medicines, they may phone the pharmacy or send a friend/relative, or have their medicines delivered, if this service is available.

Signage

- Place posters for pharmacies from www.hpsc.ie on the outer door and immediately inside the pharmacy. At the counter, you may wish to use the same poster or other posters from the IPU or public information posters from www.gov.ie Check that the advice on any posters you are using is up to date as recommendations are changing rapidly.

Communication (Messaging)

- Put a message on the phone (recorded message) and any means of communication used by the pharmacy (website, Facebook, Instagram etc.) highlighting relevant information.

Social distancing

- Ask patients and customers to keep at a distance of at least 1 metre from each other and from staff (increase the distance beyond 1m where this is practical)
- Adjust workflow and layout if needed to facilitate this.
- Deal with one person at/near the counter at a time. Consider putting tape at least one metre from the counter and ask everybody to remain behind it.
- Where closer contact is necessary, e.g. to pick up the prescription and pay at the counter, ensure the person is close to the staff member for the shortest possible period of time. The prescription can be left of the desk for the person to pick up rather than handed to the person.
- Ask people to phone ahead, so that their prescription can be collected rapidly when they arrive. Consider an appointment system for pick up to minimise the number of people waiting.
- If there will be a delay, e.g. for prescription dispensing, ask people to return at an appropriate time or to wait in their car.
- Consider any services which may involve prolonged or close contact and consider alternatives, e.g. consultations in person (offer by phone if appropriate), blood pressure monitoring. If these are necessary telephone triage in advance to ensure that the person does not have recent respiratory symptoms or fever.
- Assess the pharmacy shop floor area to see if space can be cleared to maximise distance between people and to deter people from handling display products

At the counter

- Staff should pay frequent close attention to regular hand hygiene.
- Have tissues and alcohol hand rub at the counter – encourage customers to avail of it
- Consider offering alcohol hand gel to customers before they use a commonly shared item such as a pen, touch key pad.
- Commonly shared items should be cleaned frequently using a detergent/disinfectant wipe or cleaning product compatible with manufacturers' instructions.
- Use of contactless cards for payment should be encouraged, however not all customers will be in a position to do this. There is no evidence that COVID-19 has been acquired by handling money and is likely of minimal risk providing staff practice good hand hygiene.
- Some pharmacies may change processes to minimise handling of products by people visiting the pharmacy. This should follow an assessment of risk and benefit, including efforts to minimise social contact and potential for transmission, balanced with ensuring people can get in and out of the pharmacy quickly.

Person with symptoms presents in the pharmacy

- Maintain a physical distance of at least 1m increase the distance where this is practical provide them with advice on how to access the HSE website www.hse.ie for [information](#).
- If they are asking about accessing testing for COVID-19 because they are symptomatic they should be advised to return home and contact their general practitioner BY TELEPHONE for assessment and to arrange for testing for COVID-19.
- If the individual is concerned because they do not have a GP advise them to ring HSE LIVE 1850 241 850
- Customers should be advised not to present to the GP surgery or the Emergency Department.

Staff with symptoms

- Staff should be aware not to attend work if they have any symptoms of respiratory illness but should contact their own GP for assessment (or HSE Live as above)

Environmental Cleaning/Disinfection

- Existing cleaning measures (using household detergents/disinfectants) will suffice but special attention should be paid to surfaces or items that are frequently touched by members of the public and/or staff including; counter tops, till, backs of chairs, handles of stationery blood pressure monitoring machines, door handles, dispensing drawers etc.
- Regular cleaning of staff facilities including toilets is also recommended.

Use of Personal Protective Equipment in Pharmacies

Pharmacies have been provided with packs containing gowns, mask, eye protection gloves and hand hygiene products.

It is very unlikely that these items of PPE should be required in the community pharmacy setting. Note that it takes some time to don this equipment particularly if one is not very familiar with it. The content of these packs should be reserved for any very exceptional circumstances that may arise in which a pharmacist is required to have significant close physical contact with a person with confirmed or suspect COVID-19. In all circumstances that are foreseeable it will be preferable to advise the person to leave the pharmacy to access appropriate services and to then perform hand hygiene than to have the person wait in the pharmacy while the pharmacist dons unfamiliar equipment.