



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

**Office of the Clinical Director of Health Protection, Health Service Executive**

**TO:** All service providers

**FROM:** Dr Abigail Collins, Director of Public Health, Clinical Lead Child Health  
Dr John Cuddihy, Interim Director HPSC

**RE:** HSE public health update

**DATE:** 26 November 2021

---

With the current increase in cases of COVID as well as other infections such as RSV and Influenza, it is timely to remind all staff and service users of the key measures required to keep services open and to reduce the risk of spread of infection.

**Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)**

RSV is a seasonal respiratory virus which causes very similar symptoms to COVID-19. RSV causes young children to have some difficulties with their breathing and also therefore can cause difficulties with their feeding. It is unfortunately requiring many children to need care of their GPs and also leading to hospitalisations. Staff or children with symptoms matching those of COVID-19 or RSV (particularly fever, cough, shortness of breath, rapid or noisy breathing) should **not** attend their settings, regardless of a negative COVID test, until the acute symptoms have been finished for 48 hours. We are unfortunately experiencing examples of when people have had symptoms, undertake an antigen test and returned to the facility because this was negative. A negative antigen test with symptoms should NOT facilitate return to facilities, as it may still be a covid-19 infection, or RSV, influenza or any other viral infections that can make children unwell.

Common symptoms of RSV include; runny nose, coughing, sneezing, fever and wheezing. Colleagues and parents can be advised more information can be found on the HSE website at <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/bronchiolitis/>

**Infection Prevention and Control**

Please continue to follow all the public health measures in place in ELC and SAC. The exclusion of anyone with new symptoms of Covid-19 is the core most important way of keeping infections from spreading with your facility. The operation of play-pods, wearing of face coverings, social distancing wherever possible and good respiratory hygiene then best protect from the onward spread of infection from anyone who may have had symptoms or been in the early stages of infection. Please ensure all staff, parents and children are reminded of the importance of abiding by the national public health measures currently in place.

## **Updated Guidance for ELC/ SAC Settings**

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HSPC) have updated their Infection Prevention and Control guidance for childcare settings. While some of the changes noted below aim to balance long term IPC measure with the needs for service users (children and their families) services can continue if needed to operate a heightened level of IPC measure particularly if there is a localised rise in cases. Changes to the guidance include:

- Removal of requirement for visitors to make advance appointments
- Relaxation of arrangements related to arrival and pick up of children and drop off of forgotten items
- Statement that routine temperature checking of healthy children should be avoided
- Further information on other infections and other vaccines

It important to continue observing the guidelines that remain in place such as play pods and individuals (children and adults) not attending if they are showing symptoms of respiratory infection.

Providers for both Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare settings should familiarise themselves with the updated guidance and apply it in a way that meets the needs of the child. The updated guidance document can be found here: [Infection Prevention and Control guidance for Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare settings during the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)

## **Vaccination**

The Covid-19 Vaccine is now available to everyone over the age of 12. COVID-19 can be a mild or severe illness, severe illness is much less common in those who are fully vaccinated. Vaccination is the best way we have of preventing hospital admissions and more serious end point of the disease. It also helps protect all others in our community. Therefore, we strongly recommend that all staff are vaccinated as soon as they are able, and that this is supported and facilitated by service providers.

Influenza vaccination is recommended for children aged 2 to 17 years and for some adults including people age 65 and older, pregnant women and those with certain long term conditions. The children's vaccine is given as a spray into each nostril of the nose. The full range of vaccinations recommended for children are all important as many vaccine preventable diseases including measles, mumps, rotavirus and meningococcal meningitis can spread in childcare settings. For further information see the HSE website.

## **Close contacts and testing**

HSE testing centres are operational but the system is challenged currently. However, no one symptomatic should be in the service until they are either 48 hours post-acute symptoms, or they have undertaken time requirement for COVID, this clock started from date of symptoms and not date of test so will not affect return date to work.

Symptoms of COVID-19 and a quick guide resource for children are available [here](#)

Similarly for all staff, symptoms of COVID-19 and a quick guide resource for adults and children over 13 are available [here](#)

When a person (staff or child) is diagnosed with COVID-19 the HSE works to identify people that the person was in close contact with since they got symptoms and for the 2 days before they got symptoms. People identified as close contacts are at a higher risk of developing infection therefore it is important that they remain aware of any of their symptoms. Children between the ages of 3 months and 13 years are usually only identified as close contacts within the household setting.

If a staff member is a **close contact and have symptoms of COVID-19** they need to:

- get a COVID-19 PCR test
- self-isolate

If a staff member is a **close contact of a case outside their household and do not have symptoms of COVID-19 but are fully vaccinated** they need to:

- do antigen tests

If a staff member is a **close contact and do not have symptoms of COVID-19 but are fully vaccinated household close contact** they need to:

- restrict your movements (stay at home) for 5 days from when you get the text message from the HSE
- do 3 antigen tests with 2 days between each test

If a staff member is a **close contact and does not have symptoms of COVID-19 but are not vaccinated** they need to:

- get a COVID-19 PCR test as soon as possible
- restrict your movements (stay at home) until they have undertaken a 'not detected' Day 10 PCR test

If a child is a **close contact and has symptoms of COVID-19** they need to:

- get a COVID-19 PCR test
- self-isolate

If a child is a **close contact (usually only through living in the same house as someone who is a case of Covid-19) and does not have symptoms of COVID-19** they need to:

- restrict movements (stay at home) for 14 days from when you get the text message from the HSE and have two pcr tests, one as soon as possible and one at day 10. They can end restricted movements with a Day 10 not detected result, if they have no symptoms.

It is important that anyone who is a close contact is very aware of their symptoms. Those individuals must self-isolate and undergo testing should they develop any symptoms.

**Support**

Where there is a case in your service and you need support please contact

Your local City and County Childcare Committee – [www.myccc.ie](http://www.myccc.ie) OR

HSE public health dedicated helpline for ELC/SAC services – 01-5119777

Many thanks for your continued support and engagement in these difficult times