



## **COVID-19: update on working arrangements for the civil and public service**

**12 March 2020 until 29 March 2020**

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To all civil and public servants:

As you may know, today the Government advised on a number of measures to ensure public health and safety in light of COVID-19. All indoor mass gatherings of more than 100 people and outdoor mass gatherings of more than 500 people should be cancelled. Schools, colleges, and childcare facilities will close from tomorrow. Where possible, teaching will be done on-line or remotely. Cultural institutions will close. The Government's priority is to ensure the health of the public, whilst at the same time ensuring the continuation of public services, especially essential public services. We are taking proactive measures to protect the health of the public and our employees while continuing to provide essential services.

As such the following arrangements will apply to civil and public service employees from now. Further guidance will be provided in due course. This guidance will be applied in the main but can be amended to reflect local circumstances.

### Essential services

It is important to note that essential services will continue to operate. Employers must ensure that all staff are aware of their business continuity plans and emergency protocol arrangements. In order to keep services operational, employers should look at the potential to extend opening hours, stagger opening hours and introduce flexible working arrangements. While the recommendations on mass gatherings do not currently apply to places of work, it is important that employers support social distancing measures while continuing to provide essential public services.

Employers should identify essential services and additional staff may be required from within the system to cover these services. Hence civil and public servants, who are well, may be redeployed to work across the civil and public service during



this time. Employers should also arrange, as necessary, to reassign staff within their own organisations from less critical to more critical services.

### Working from home

Parts of the public service are enabled to work remotely. Where employees can work from home this should be facilitated to the maximum extent feasible. Steps should be taken to increase the scope for remote working and all opportunities and flexibilities need to be exploited. This, amongst other things, will decrease the numbers in places of work which will facilitate social distancing. We understand that the HSA will be issuing guidance on temporarily working from home for employers in this emergency situation.

### Reasons for being at home

There are a number of reasons why employees will need to stay at home in the coming weeks:

- **Self-isolation on medical/HSE advice:** it is crucial that employees follow the HSE guidance on self-isolation). Civil and public servants should follow the new self-isolation notification guidelines. These will issue shortly from DPER. In the interim the same notification arrangements set out in the COVID-19 FAQs apply. Special leave with pay will apply in this scenario.
- **Symptoms:** Employees who have symptoms should self-isolate in accordance with HSE Guidelines. Special leave with pay will apply in this scenario.
- **Caring responsibilities e.g. due to the closure of a primary school/crèche:** in this scenario both employers and employees should be flexible in their approach to ensure business continuity and employees should work from home where possible. Employers need to implement alternative working arrangements to support employees to attend work. For example, this could include flexible shifts and longer opening hours, to support the provision of services while supporting social distancing measures. Civil and public service employees must stay in regular contact with their managers at all times throughout the period. DPER is reviewing the process for managing caring responsibilities during COVID-19.



### Attending work

Employees who do not fall into one of the above categories should still attend work in line with their organisations business continuity measures. Employers should take immediate steps to support social distancing measures including remote working, staggered shifts and flexible working hours in order to support and maximise social distancing whilst ensuring business continuity.

We will continue to keep you updated as matters progress.

Civil Service HR Division