



COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN

INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY CARLOW

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Institute of Technology Carlow – COVID-19 Response Plan

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Response Plan is to set out how we will manage our activities on campus and how we will ensure that we are aligned with national public health guidance to facilitate all Institute activities. This plan considers the most up to date good practice guidance published on 31st January 2022 which is the *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19*.

The public health management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland continues to evolve in light of changing circumstances and risks. The *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19*, which has evolved from the Work Safely Protocol (last updated on 14 January 2022) and reflects the most recent public health advice, is the current guidance for the safe return and continued safe operating of workplaces.

On 21st of January, the Government announced the easing of a number of public health measures, while emphasising a continued strong focus on personal protective behaviours, based on individual and sectoral risk assessments, for the coming period.

The most recent changes to public health advice have seen a number of measures removed including for example, the general requirement for physical distancing of 2 metres in workplaces. There has also been a removal of the need to maintain contact details, however, employers may need to provide attendance information as appropriate to the Department of Public Health if they are investigating an outbreak in the workplace. As part of the phased approach to the return to physical workplaces, employers and workers are called upon to be supportive of continued good practices, built up over the past two years, which support a safe working environment for all. Continued adoption of good infection prevention and control measures such as hand washing, respiratory hygiene, and ventilation is advised. Critical components of the collective response in relation to COVID-19 continue to apply including the rapid self-isolation if symptomatic (even if fully vaccinated/boosted) or if having a positive COVID-19 test.

2 NATIONAL GUIDANCE

On 31st January 2022, the *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19* was published which has evolved from the Work Safely Protocol (last updated on 14 January 2022), and reflects the most recent public health advice, is the current guidance for the safe return and continued safe operating of workplaces.

[Transitional Protocol](#)

3 COVID RESPONSE AND OUTBREAK TEAMS

The Senior Management Team (SMT) is responsible for the overall institutional response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to this end the SMT has established eight COVID Response Teams (CRTs). These are listed in Sections 3.1 to 3.8 below.

The SMT, together with the Estates Manager, is also the designated HEI COVID-19 Outbreak Response Team (CORT). The purpose of the CORT is to act as on-going liaison with the HSE, as appropriate, and to assist HSE Public Health in outbreak management / control as required. This includes the provision of timely information to facilitate contact tracing; assisting with communications; and implementation of preventive measures where required.

The SMT has designated the Estates Manager as the HEI COVID Outbreak Coordinator to act as the contact person for the regional HSE Department of Public Health to facilitate timely communications and Public Health actions and to provide high-level oversight of implementation of Public Health measures on campus, including prevention measures and maintenance of appropriate records. The Estates Manager is also the designated Institutional Contact with availability to HSE Public Health and HEI colleagues as appropriate.

The investigation and management of all cases/outbreaks of notifiable infectious diseases, including COVID-19, are the legislative responsibility of the Medical Officer of Health (HSE Public Health). If necessary, HSE Public Health may convene an Outbreak Control Team, this is different to the CORT outlined above.

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 are notified to HSE Public Health under current Infectious Disease legislation. If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 they will be contacted by HSE Public Health and advised regarding further action. Patient confidentiality is the cornerstone of all clinical interactions. Contact tracing will be undertaken and if there is a risk of transmission, then those at risk will be contacted by the HSE. If an outbreak of COVID-19 in a HEI is suspected, Public Health will undertake a risk assessment and act appropriately to protect the health of students and staff.

Within the context of the higher education sector, and the institutional response to suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 on-campus, the Institute is cognisant of the guidance that a Public Health Risk Assessment is not required for all confirmed cases of COVID-19 with links to a higher educational setting. If information gathered by the HSE during a case investigation suggests a need for HSE Public Health input, then HSE Public Health will contact the higher/further education institution directly to discuss further action, including a Public Health Risk Assessment.

3.1 Procurement (Protective Equipment / Consumables) CRT

The role of this CRT is to develop and implement a plan to procure and distribute, in a timely manner, specialised resources related to the COVID-19 institutional response.

3.2 National Protocols CRT

The role of this CRT is to localise COVID-19 specific national protocol(s) for the safety and wellbeing of the Institute's community.

3.3 Operations and Communications CRT

The role of this CRT is to provide a forum where COVID-19 protocols and other matters can be discussed and communicated in an effective and timely manner.

3.4 Hybrid Learning CRT

The role of this CRT is to develop policies and guidelines on structured and inclusive teaching, learning and assessment, providing clear communications and supports to staff and learners on their implementation within the COVID-19 context.

3.5 Student Experience and Support CRT

The role of this CRT is to ensure that the learner experience is supported and central to the implementation of COVID-19 protocols.

3.6 Remote Working CRT

The role of this CRT is to develop interim policies and procedures for remote working for staff necessitated by COVID-19 and to develop and implement a plan to support staff in their remote working.

3.7 Research CRT

The role of this CRT is to develop policies and procedures to support research and researchers, including protocols for the phased return of researchers to laboratories, workshops, and workstations within the COVID-19 context.

3.8 Wexford Campus CRT

The role of this CRT is to localise COVID-19 national protocol(s) and ensure consistent application of all COVID-19 related guidelines in the Wexford Campus from all CRTs.

4 INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY CARLOW COVID-19 POLICY

This COVID-19 Policy outlines our commitment as an employer to implement the plan and help prevent the spread of the virus.

5 CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

5.1 WHAT IS CORONVIRUS

COVID-19 is an illness that can affect lungs and airways. It is caused by a Coronavirus called CoronavirusSARS-CoV-2. Current evidence suggests that the virus is significantly more infectious than the flu that circulates every winter. Viruses can be easily spread to other people and patients are normally infectious until all the symptoms have gone.

5.2 SYMPTOMS

Common symptoms may include a fever, a cough and shortness of breath and loss/change of taste or smell. Regular updates can be found on the HSE website (Symptoms of COVID-19 - HSE)

5.3 HOW IS CORONAVIRUS SPREAD

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is spread in sneeze or cough droplets. You could get the virus if you;

- (a) come into close contact with someone who has the virus and is coughing or sneezing
- (b) touch surfaces that someone who has the virus has coughed or sneezed on and bring your unwashed hands to your face (eyes, nose or mouth)
- (c) Please refer to the HSE for further guidance

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/how-coronavirus-is-spread.html>

6 CONTROL MEASURES TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

6.1 Prevention of Spread

It is advised to follow the HSE guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Please refer to the following HSE link for up-to-date guidance

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/protect-yourself-and-others.html>

Hand Hygiene

You must:

Wash hands before leaving home and on arrival on campus. Ensure you are familiar with and follow hand hygiene guidance.

Wash your hands with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand rub regularly.

- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.
- Do not share objects that touch your mouth e.g., bottles, cups, pens
- Please read and follow the HSE guidelines for hand hygiene
<https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

Respiratory Hygiene

You must:

- Adopt good respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Cover nose/mouth with a tissue when coughing/sneezing and dispose of used tissue (If no tissues are available, cough or sneeze into the inner elbow rather than into the hand).
- Keep contaminated hands away from the eyes and nose.
- Carry out hand hygiene after coughing or sneezing.

Physical Distancing

The requirement to maintain physical distancing and to adopt pods for indoors has been removed.

However, it is still good practice to adopt physical distancing in congested spaces and there are control measures still in place to allow staff and students to avail of this practice, such as screens. It is the responsibility of each person to decide on when physical distancing is appropriate.

The current physical distancing control measure of screens will be phased out by the Institute over time. Screens should not be removed by staff and/or students in the interim.

Face Coverings

Current public health advice is that face coverings are mandatory in a number of settings (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/aac74c-guidance-on-safe-use-of-face-coverings/>).

When on campuses of Institute of Technology Carlow, we encourage staff and students to continue to wear face coverings now that physical distancing has been removed. This includes common circulation and seated areas, particularly in instances where close contact cannot be avoided.

It should be noted that the wearing of face coverings is an additional measure to other public health guidelines, which must also be followed such as hand washing, respiratory etiquette and is not a substitute for correct working practices.

Symptoms

Ensuring no person with symptoms as outlined under the HSE guidelines attends our buildings.

7 OPERATIONS IN INSTITUTE BUILDINGS

Operations in buildings are being carried out in accordance with the latest Government guidelines.

These will continue to be informed by assessments of each area and for each department or functional area, to ensure that the area can accommodate staff and students safely.

8 LEAD WORKER REPRESENTATIVES (LWRS)

In addition to the CRTs (Section 3) and in line with the recommendations from the *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19*, Lead Worker Representatives (LWRs) are designated in areas across each campus to assist in implementation and monitoring of adherence to COVID-19 requirements. The LWR's have received updated training for their role in 2021 and remain a key point of contact and support to the Institute in responding to COVID-19.

9 CAMPUS SAFETY PROTOCOL

During Term 2, Institute safety protocols and control measures remain in place. We must remain vigilant for COVID-19 within our community.

9.1 Staff and Students Responsibilities

Most of the adult population in Ireland will have been vaccinated in 2021 with a subsequent booster in 2021/2022. This had the capacity to transform the operational environment on-site for the higher education sector, as well as elsewhere in the workplace and in society generally.

All staff and students must keep themselves updated on the latest advice from Government and the HSE. They must also co-operate in maintaining the control measures put in place to prevent the spread of the virus and report issues or concerns that they may have.

All staff and students must self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and must follow the latest advice from the HSE in relation to isolation and testing.
<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/restricted-movements/>

All staff and students should follow good practices and use control measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 while on campus. This includes, but is not limited to, hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, continue to wear face coverings and minimising contact.

Institute staff are provided with cleaning materials to keep their workspace hygienically clean. All staff and students should clean surfaces in classrooms and other common areas before and after use to assist with preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Areas used by campus communities are cleaned as per COVID-19 cleaning and disinfection guidelines provided by the Health and Safety Authority.

9.2 COVID-19 Information Update

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19 on Institute of Technology Carlow campuses, there is a COVID-19 information update provided for staff before returning to campus for Term 2. Staff must make themselves aware of these updates and ongoing changes to guidance throughout the term. <https://www.itcarlow.ie/covid-19-update-2022/procedures-forms-and-training-for-staff.htm>

If you are a member of staff and if you are considered at very high risk from COVID-19 and not vaccinated, please check the information at the link here <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/people-at-higher-risk/not-vaccinated/> and inform hrresponse@itcarlow.ie.

Every student must make themselves aware of the COVID-19 information update provided for students before returning to campus for Term 2. If you are a student considered to be at very high risk from COVID-19 and you are not vaccinated, you must contact Studentservices@itcarlow.ie so that a specific assessment can be carried out in accordance with Student Services protocols. You must not present on-campus until StudentServices@itcarlow.ie have given you permission to do so.

9.3 COVID-19 Risk and Control Measures Assessment

Risk assessments have been carried out throughout the Institute. The hazards associated with the transmission of COVID-19 are identified and the risks and control measures to minimise risk are set out on the COVID-19 Risk and Control Measure Assessment Form.

The controls arising from the risk assessment are based on national and international guidance on the prevention of the spread of COVID-19. The risk assessments for activities in the Institute are regularly reviewed and will be updated as necessary when new information becomes available. Specific risk assessments are available from the relevant Head of Department.

10 COMMUNICATION

The contents of this document and other associated controls are communicated through signage, a designated Institute webpage (<https://www.itcarlow.ie/covid-19-update-2022.htm>) social media, campus TV screens and internal emails.

Providing continuous communication to staff and students in advance of 2022 Term 2 is essential to ensuring that controls are effective.

This COVID-19 Response Plan is being made available to all staff and students and is available on our website.

All LWRs have received training in their role, and this was delivered prior to undertaking this role.

The Senior Management Team ensures that induction is delivered on the specific controls that are in place.

11 RISK CATEGORIES

11.1 Staff

Human Resources (HR) request staff who are at very high risk of infection with COVID-19 and unvaccinated to alert them of their condition so that arrangements can put in place to minimise or eliminate workplace transmission risk. HR then liaises with the appropriate line manager to discuss options for alternative arrangements.

11.2 Students

Heads of Departments request students who are at very high risk of infection with COVID-19 and unvaccinated to alert them of their condition so that arrangements can put in place to minimise or eliminate transmission risk. The Head of Department then liaises with the student and Student Services to discuss options for alternative arrangements.

12 SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Institute Safety Management System is updated to cover measures that are being implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This includes updates to the Parent Safety Statement and Ancillary Safety Statements.

13 BUILDING MANAGEMENT

This section outlines the controls that are required in the buildings to provide a safe working environment for our staff. The following are intended to provide high level guidance.

13.1 Ventilation Management

The *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19* sets out that; “ventilation refers to the movement of outdoor air into a building, and the circulation of that air within the building or room while removing stale air to improve the air quality. This can be achieved through natural means (e.g., opening a window) or by mechanical means e.g. HVAC systems.” Ventilation is introduced into a room on our campuses by natural ventilation through windows and mechanical ventilated systems.

In accordance with national protocols, technical and COVID guidelines, each room has been risk assessed with respect to ventilation and the type of ventilation specific to the room is identified on posters inside each room.

Adjustments were made to all our mechanical ventilation systems in 2020 to provide 100% fresh air into a room and hence not have re-circulated air in a room. Where re-circulation of air could not be achieved rooms were taken out of use.

Ventilation is managed daily by opening windows in classrooms and in addition mechanical ventilation systems are checked each morning and continuously monitored throughout the day by Estates staff.

Ventilation should not be seen as a replacement for the other infection prevention and control measures advised such as handwashing, surface cleaning, respiratory etiquette and wearing masks/face coverings. See Work Safely Protocol issued on 18/11/2021 for more detail on the ventilation guidance that has been adopted by the Institute.. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/22829a-return-to-work-safely-protocol/>

13.2 Office Accommodation

Office areas have been assessed and occupants of these areas are required to follow COVID-19 risk assessments. Control measures have been introduced across all office accommodation to ensure adequate sanitisation and ventilation. Screens have been put in place to provide a barrier where persons are facing each other which allows for masks to be removed whilst sitting at desks, however these measures will be reviewed in the coming months to align with latest good practice guidelines.

Signage: Appropriate signage and procedures have been erected to highlight ventilation strategies as well as cleaning requirements of workstations and other high touch areas.

Cleaning: Each office is provided with cleaning materials. Office users are responsible for cleaning their own area or high touch areas after use. If cleaning supplies are running low, inform your line manager in enough time to ensure these supplies are restocked.

13.3 Reception/Porters Desk

Enhanced protection in the form of screens is in place in departmental reception areas. The main reception desk has a glazed screen. These measures will remain in place and will be reviewed to align with good practice guidelines.

13.4 Canteen

13.4.1 Canteen Layout

Screens are generally provided on canteen tables as a control measure. These will be phased out to align with good practice guidelines, however, should not be removed by staff and/or students.

There are areas where seating has been reduced and re-organised to provide separation. It is important that current seating arrangements are not changed by users as this is in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Additional seating will be re-introduced on a phased basis.

13.4.2 Reducing cross contamination

The cleaning regime in the canteen area has been reviewed in line with recommendations with the cleaning protocols set out by the HSA.

The cleaning schedule is as per the schedule set out in Section 15.

It is recommended that payments in the canteen areas be taken by contactless card wherever possible.

13.4.3 Canteen Hygiene

Hand sanitising is available at entry to the canteen and at key points within the canteen.

13.5 Toilets

Controls, including signage, have been introduced in all shared toilets to ensure good hygiene practices are observed. The maximum capacity of toilets must always be observed. Cleaning in toilets is being carried out in accordance with *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19* (see Section 15 for further details).

13.6 Shared Drinking Water Dispensers

Shared drink water dispensers have been replaced with contactless sensors in the canteen area to reduce the risk of cross contamination.

13.7 Facility, Laboratory, Information Technology, and other Maintenance

All statutory and emergency maintenance has continued as normal throughout the pandemic event.

Controls have been put in place to ensure that all maintenance and service engineers and contractors coming to site will not have a negative impact on COVID-19 control measures.

Estates are ensuring that the following minimum controls are in place:

- All engineers and contractors are required to provide a Risk Assessment / Method Statement in respect of COVID-19.
- Site visits are scheduled for pre-agreed dates and times.

14 POST and DELIVERIES

The risk from surface contamination is considered low due to the increased hand and respiratory hygiene practices that are in place. Post and deliveries are received without the need for contact with the driver and staff exercise good hand hygiene when handling post.

15 CLEANING

The high standard of cleanliness across all Institute campuses has continued and been reinforced in the context of COVID-19. Following the *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19*, cleaning is conducted at regular intervals, which is in line with the Institutes current practices.

A review of the cleaning and disinfection schedule has been carried out and compared to the existing schedule. The findings from this review have shown that the Institute's existing cleaning schedule has a higher cleaning frequency than that recommended by the COVID-19 guidance documents. The cleaning schedules are in accordance with *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19* includes the following:

- Daily Office Cleaning: The standard cleaning schedule is carried out in offices where practicable. In addition to this there are cleaning materials available in offices for staff to clean their workstations as well as common touch areas. Once cleaning materials run low staff should contact their line manager to replenish these materials.
- The *Transitional Protocol - Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19* recommends that common contact/ touch point cleaning in common areas is carried out. Washrooms such as toilets are cleaned at regular intervals. In practice, toilets are cleaned at least four times daily under the current cleaning schedule.
- Where confirmation of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 is identified, localised deep clean and/or sanitisation of rooms will be carried out in accordance with the guidance set out under ECDC.
- Stocks of essential consumables (e.g., sanitiser fluids, paper towels, etc.) are held on campus to ensure that enough supply is maintained.
- All toilets and wash areas have enough hot water, paper towels, sanitisers, etc. to provide for safe hand hygiene.
- Mobile wash stations are in place across campuses to encourage good hand hygiene practices.
- Sanitisers and cleaning materials are provided to each Faculty and Department for distribution and use in offices.
- Staff are required to adopt a clear desk policy and clean their own desk surfaces daily.
- All users (staff and students) must sanitise touch points on shared equipment and tools before and after use. Examples are desks, chair arms, printers, keyboard and mouse.
- All users must adhere to cleaning protocols in labs and workshops in accordance with departmental protocols.

16 CAMPUS COMPANIES

Campus Companies generally work from the ERIC building. A risk assessment of that building has taken place with recommended control measures.

17 UPDATES TO EXISTING SAFETY PROCEDURES

17.1 FIRST AIDERS

Due to the nature of the First Aiders, their role may come into close contact with suspected cases of COVID-19 or may on occasion need to assist a person with other conditions. While guidance has been developed in respect of responding to suspected cases of COVID-19, this guidance will be reviewed and updated to ensure controls are in place for all eventualities that may require close contact. First aiders will be alerted to the guidance¹ with the Institute providing updated awareness training to first aiders.

17.2 FIRE SAFETY/FIRE DRILLS

Fire safety measures will continue to be applied and at least one drill will be held

18 SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED CASES OF COVID-19

18.1 Suspect COVID-19 Case at Work

If a member of staff or a student experiences any COVID-19 symptoms and their condition deteriorates they are required to self-isolate immediately and inform their line manager or head of department or designated COVID-19 contact by phone or email. If possible, the staff member or student should go home, but not without notifying their line manager or head of department or designated COVID-19 contact first.

Where the affected member of staff or student is not able to go home, they will be brought to a designated isolation room by a first aider or nurse. A decision will be made on whether to call an ambulance or to allow the person to travel home to self-isolate.

There will be a kit of protective equipment provided for both first aider and the affected staff member/student which includes a face mask, gloves, disposable apron and face shield/eye protection.

¹PreHospital Emergency Care Council COVID-19 Advisory
https://www.phecit.ie/PHECC/Publications_and_Resources/Newsletters/Newsletter_Items/2020/PHECC_COVID_19_Advisory_v1.aspx

COVID-19: Guidance for First Responders <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-interim-guidance-for-first-responders/interim-guidance-for-first-responders-and-others-in-close-contact-with-symptomatic-people-with-potential-2019-ncov>

The designated isolation room will be cleaned and disinfected after the patient has left.

The identified isolation rooms are as follows:

- Medical Centre, Barrow Centre.
- Dargan Board Room.
- ERIC Meeting Room.
- Wexford, Summerhill.
- Wexford, Arts Campus.

18.2 Contact with a Confirmed Case

If a confirmed case is identified, those who have had close contact may be asked to stay at home as directed by the HSE and follow the restricted movements guidance set out by the HSE.

If a member of staff and/or student is a close contact they should follow and implement current HSE advice on close contact requirements, <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/contact-tracing/close-contact/>

They should remain vigilant for symptoms of COVID-19 and should not come on campus if they have any symptoms.

19 CONTACT TRACING

Contact tracing can be beneficial in limiting the spread of infection following a suspected or confirmed case. To be effective it needs to be efficient and accurate.

Staff and students attending face-to-face meetings should keep their own record of such meetings and the attendees to facilitate close contact tracing if necessary.

20 WHEN NOT TO ATTEND CAMPUS

You must not attend campus in the following circumstances:

- (1) You have COVID-19 symptoms. You should self-isolate and contact the HSE to request a test.
- (2) You have been diagnosed with COVID-19 recently or are awaiting test results. If positive, you are required to self-isolate as directed by the HSE.

If you are a close contact refer to the guidance on our website which sets out the requirements about mask wearing and movement restrictions. (<https://www.itcarlow.ie/covid-19-update-2022.htm>)

Note: the disposable masks provided by the Institute are surgical grade meet the HSE requirements for asymptomatic close contacts.

21 TRAVEL TO/FROM/FOR WORK

Where a staff member exhibits any signs of COVID-19 they should not travel to work. They should inform their line manager and contact the HSE Helpline.