

The Grand Lodge of Freemasons of Ireland

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Masonic Meetings

This guidance document gives general advice about preventing the spread of COVID-19 during Masonic Meetings/gatherings.

Background

In late December 2019 Chinese authorities identified a cluster of novel coronavirus infections in Wuhan City, China. The name of the virus is SARS-CoV-2 and the name of the disease it causes is COVID-19.

The outbreak has evolved rapidly and further global spread is likely. Because of the risk of the disease spreading to Ireland, we must take all possible action to prevent the potential spread of the disease in the community.

COVID-19 can be a mild or severe illness.

The symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Fever (high temperature)

COVID-19 can also result in more severe illness including:

- Pneumonia
- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
- Kidney Failure

Further information on COVID-19 is available on the HSE website at:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html>

The SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 is spread mainly through droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. You could get the virus if you:

- come into contact with someone who has the virus and is coughing or sneezing
- touch surfaces or objects that someone who has the virus has coughed or sneezed on, and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes.

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General recommendations for all

People who are ill should not attend Masonic meetings.

If any members of your Masonic Body or any gathering of Freemasons, feel ill and may have COVID-19 (see below), even if their symptoms are mild, they should stay at home and follow this advice:

If you **feel unwell with symptoms of COVID-19** (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, high temperature)

AND

If in the 14 days before you became unwell, you have:

- travelled to Ireland from an [area with presumed ongoing community transmission of COVID-19](#), or
- been in contact with a person who has COVID-19, or
- attended/worked in a healthcare facility where patients with COVID-19 were being treated

then you should:

- **Isolate yourself** (i.e. stay separate from other people)
- **Phone your GP without delay. If you do not have a GP phone the Emergency Services on 999 or 112 and ask for the National Ambulance Service.** Tell your GP/Emergency Services about your travel history and symptoms.
- It is important that you **PHONE your GP first and talk to them rather than arriving at the GP surgery without contacting them** so that you don't put staff or other patients at risk of infection.
- Your GP/Emergency Services will advise you of the next steps over the phone.

If any members of your Masonic Body or any gathering of Freemasons, **feel well** and have no symptoms, but in the past 14 days they have:

- travelled to Ireland from an [area with presumed ongoing community transmission of COVID-19](#), or
- been in contact with a person who has COVID-19, or
- attended/worked in a healthcare facility where patients with COVID-19 are being treated they should phone in the Republic of Ireland **HSELive helpline on 1850 24 1850** or in Northern Ireland **NHS helpline on 111** for advice.

High risk groups

Those considered to be at higher risk for COVID-19 include the following:

- People aged 65 years and older
- People with long-term medical conditions – for example, heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or liver disease

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Reducing the spread of infection

You should always practice good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene. Hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene are a series of actions to take which are designed to reduce the spread of disease, including COVID-19, to yourself and others. These actions include regular handwashing and covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or the bend of your elbow when you cough or sneeze.

Hand hygiene:

Wash your hands regularly. You should wash your hands:

- after coughing or sneezing
- before, during and after you prepare food
- before eating
- after using the toilet
- before and after caring for sick individuals
- when hands are dirty
- after handling animals or animal waste

Wash your hands with soap and running water when hands are visibly dirty. If your hands are not visibly dirty, wash them with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub.

See HSE hand hygiene guidance at <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

Respiratory hygiene:

Cover your mouth and nose with a clean tissue when you cough and sneeze and then promptly dispose of the tissue in a bin and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the bend of your elbow instead, not into your hands.

[Posters](#) on preventing spread of infection are available on the HPSC website.

Settings where Masonic Meetings take place, should take the following actions

- Advise members not to attend if they are ill.
- Have a plan for dealing with members who become ill with symptoms of COVID-19 during a meeting, including isolating them from other people and seeking medical advice without delay (e.g. phone a GP/ Emergency Services).
- Supply tissues and alcohol based hand gel at meetings/gatherings.
- Provide bins for disposal of tissues at meetings/gatherings.
- Ensure hand-washing facilities, including soap and disposable towels, are well maintained.
- Ensure all hard surfaces that are frequently touched, such as door handles, hand rails, taps and seating are cleaned regularly with a household detergent.
- Have a plan for how the meeting will continue or suspend its activities in the event of members becoming ill with COVID-19.

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Physical interaction during meetings, e.g. Hand Contact

Most physical interaction during meetings, e.g. Hand Contact, involves a low risk of spreading the virus especially if members who are unwell do not attend meetings while they are ill.

However, because COVID-19 is a new disease that has not been seen in people before, we need to exercise extreme caution to limit the spread of the virus. Current information suggests that COVID-19 can spread easily between people and could be spread from an infected person even before they develop any symptoms. For these reasons we suggest that physical interaction during meetings, including Hand Contact, should be suspended. For meetings, you may choose to give the members permission to carry out an alternative that does not involve hand contact (such as reciting the words only) if so wished.

The practice of Hand Contact on greeting and departure at meetings/gatherings should be suspended.

Arrangements for activities/social gatherings

Activities/social gatherings on Masonic premises should follow sensible practices, including hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene as described in this guidance. Posters/notices formally stating any guidance or changes in practice should be clearly displayed and appropriate leaflets should be circulated.

Further sources of information

Further information on COVID-19 is available on the following websites at:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

and the HPSC website at:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/>