

## **COVID-19 – RETURN TO WORK SAFELY PROTOCOL ADVICE FOR CO-OPERATIVES**

11 May 2020

On 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020, the Government of Ireland issued the [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#). This is the COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for employers and workers in Ireland.

The Protocol is not intended to replace the existing measures already implemented by co-operatives providing essential services which have continued to operate. However, these co-operatives should review their existing measures to ensure they are in line with this Protocol.

The Protocol sets out the need for co-operatives and other employers to ensure strong communication, a shared collaborative approach and regular engagement between the co-operative and its workers in all matters relating to COVID-19 and the preventative measures being implemented.

With a view to achieving the above aims, at least one lead worker representative should be appointed by the co-operative to ensure that COVID-19 measures are strictly adhered to in their place of work.

The person(s) undertaking the role must receive the necessary training and have a structured framework to follow within the organisation to be effective in preventing the spread of the virus. Employers will have regular and meaningful engagement with their worker representative, workers and/or their recognised Trade Union or other representatives (including their Health and Safety Committee where this exists) about the measures being put in place.

Co-operatives are advised to appoint a number of worker representatives for COVID-19 proportionate to the number of workers in the workplace and ensure these representatives are clearly identifiable.

ICOS Skillnet can assist your co-operative with your training needs arising from the Protocol. Please contact [billy.goodburn@icos.ie](mailto:billy.goodburn@icos.ie) to discuss these training needs.

The protocol sets out key tasks that co-operatives and other employers must complete to effectively implement the Protocol:

1. Develop and/or update the COVID-19 Response Plan in advance of returning to work
2. Develop or amend policies and procedures for prompt identification and isolation of workers who may have symptoms of COVID-19, as appropriate
3. Develop, consult, communicate and implement workplace changes or policies
4. Implementing the COVID-19 prevention and control measures to minimise risk to workers

In addition, the Protocol obliges co-operatives and other employers to address:

1. The workers role
2. Customer facing roles
3. Occupational health and safety measures and recommendations.

Within the key headings outlined above, co-operatives and other employers are obliged to:

- Provide COVID-19 induction training for all workers before the co-operative's workplace reopens
- Issue a pre-return to work form for workers to complete at least 3 days in advance of their return to work
- Update the co-operative's safety plans before reopening, in consultation with, and with the agreement of workers
  - The plan should include measures relevant to COVID-19, for example, social distancing, the provision of hand sanitisers, tissues and clinical waste bags, clear procedures around handwashing and respiratory etiquette, and ensuring proper ventilation on site
- Keep a log of any group work in order to facilitate contact tracing
- Put a response plan in place, outlining details of how they will deal with a suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace, to include a designated manager in charge
  - If a worker displays any symptoms of the virus during work hours, the designated manager must direct that person to a designated isolation area, along a designated route, all the time maintaining a 2 metre distance, and arrange for that person to remain in isolation before arranging for them to be transported home, or to a medical facility, avoiding public transport
  - The co-operative must also carry out a full risk assessment of the incident to see what, if any, further action needs to be taken
- Organise breaks and rest periods to facilitate social distancing
- In settings where 2 metre separation is not possible, alternative protective measures such as installation of physical barriers/plastic sneeze guards should be put in place.

The [guidance document issued by Government](#) is a live document may be subject to change. Therefore, co-operatives should ensure they are aware of any changes to the guidelines.

Should you wish to discuss the above in further detail, please contact [dwalshe@icos.ie](mailto:dwalshe@icos.ie) or [sfarrell@icos.ie](mailto:sfarrell@icos.ie).