

October 2020

## Guidance for the protection of persons who are at a higher risk of developing complications if infected with the COVID19 virus

Scientific evidence shows that persons within the following groups are at a higher risk of developing complications if infected with the COVID19 virus:

- a) persons of sixty-five (65) years of age or over
- b) all pregnant women, especially beyond twenty-eight 28 weeks of pregnancy
- c) persons suffering from chronic illnesses and, or severe medical conditions including:
  - a. insulin dependent diabetics
  - b. persons who are immunosuppressed
  - c. persons undergoing any immunosuppressive treatment including but not limited to the use of biological agents and immunomodulators
  - d. persons suffering from cancer who are undergoing chemotherapy
  - e. persons suffering, or who have suffered, from cancer having undergone chemotherapy at any time within the last six (6) months
  - f. persons suffering from haematological cancers
  - g. persons with severe chronic liver disease
  - h. persons with severe chronic renal failure or who are on dialysis
  - i. persons with chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy
- d) persons who are admitted to hospital with recurrent episodes (exacerbations) of respiratory problems
- e) persons who, at any time within the last year, have been admitted to hospital with respiratory problem exacerbations
- f) persons suffering from cardiac disease who are required to undergo a cardiac intervention or a cardiac surgical procedure
- g) persons suffering, or who have suffered, from cardiac disease having undergone a cardiac intervention or a cardiac surgical procedure at any time during the last six (6) months
- h) persons attending a heart failure clinic
- i) persons on regular oral steroids i.e. steroid tablets

Other medical conditions can put a person at higher risk of complications so if in doubt, discuss your condition with your doctor.

**It is strongly recommended that persons at risk of complications from COVID-19 infection get vaccinated against seasonal influenza since they are at higher risk of complications from influenza too.**

How is Coronavirus spread?

Coronavirus is spread through droplet infection by means of close contact with an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your nose, eyes or mouth without washing or sanitizing your hands.

The potential for becoming infected is a factor of the viral load, which is the number of viral particles that one may have become exposed and the time of exposure i.e. how long one was exposed to the infective particles.

### ➤ **What is the best way to reduce risk of an essential activity?**

Each person at risk of complications from COVID-19 infection needs to make his/her own assessment of what constitutes an essential activity and the risk this entails, by being aware of the ways in which coronavirus can be acquired and by taking all necessary precautions so as to minimize risks. Risk is cumulative, so every additional activity, the number of other persons that you come into contact with and the duration of the contact, increase the total risk.

This guide aims to characterize the risk of several daily activities and provide an estimate of risk for each activity. Guidance on how to make these activities as safe as possible is also provided and based on the following principles:

- ✓ Always keep a safe physical distance of 2 metres from others
- ✓ Avoid crowds
- ✓ Always wear a mask when with persons from other households
- ✓ Avoid physical greetings such as handshaking, hugs and kisses
- ✓ Wash your hands regularly with soap and water or a hand sanitizer containing at least 70% alcohol
- ✓ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth

## **A. Attending Medical Appointments**

You should attend for all medical appointments as scheduled. Some medical appointments can take place by virtual means (over the internet) or over the telephone. If you are required to attend for your appointment in person, make sure that you arrive on time to avoid unnecessary waiting and crowding. Make sure that you keep the appropriate physical distance at all times, carry hand sanitizer with you and use it as frequently as necessary, avoid touching your face and wear a mask covering your nose, mouth and chin.

## **B. Attending for work**

Workplaces and offices should be made safe for persons at risk of complications from COVID-19 infection. At all times, staff should practice social distancing from each other, observe and practice hygiene measures and wear masks. For more details, refer to the Guidance for Offices and Workspaces issued by the health authorities<sup>1</sup>. Where the nature of the work is amenable, telework should be encouraged to minimise the number of staff that are physically present at the workplace at any one time. Remote working on a regular basis based on a case-by-case assessment should be considered as an option by the employer where a safe working

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance-for-Offices-and-Workspaces\\_11Sep20.pdf](https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance-for-Offices-and-Workspaces_11Sep20.pdf)

environment cannot be secured for persons at risk of complications. Caution should be exercised during breaktimes when masks are removed to eat.

### C. Visiting retail outlets and making use of personal services

- Good practices such as groceries delivered by the supermarket, local store or a relative or friend / neighbour are to be kept and promoted. Refer to the guidance for Grocery Shopping which can be found on [www.covid19health.gov.mt](http://www.covid19health.gov.mt) If you go to the shop /supermarket yourself, try to go at a time when it is less busy, and you are likely to encounter less people.
- Take precautions when using public transport or car sharing options using mask, observing hand hygiene and practicing social distancing.
- Always wear a face mask when in contact with groups of people such as during shopping.
- Keep an adequate physical distance from others.
- Do not touch your face or the front, or inside of your mask.
- Keep your hands clean.
- Attend at a time which is likely to be less crowded, stores and services would have had less customers and would likely just have been cleaned.
- Go to shops where the establishment adopts good COVID-19 mitigation measures.

### D. Recreational Activity and Sport

Taking part in a recreational activity and doing physical exercise is beneficial for all, particularly for those who suffer from chronic illnesses and who are at risk of complications from COVID-19 infection. Going for a brisk walk or a jog depending on your general fitness level, is beneficial. It is important to select a place and a time which is not busy with other persons and you can adequately maintain a safe distance from others.

If you still drive, going for a drive with members of your household is one of the activities which is safe to do. Avoid using the recirculated air option for the vehicle's ventilation. Operate the AC with ventilation selector on outside air. Typically, this is presented with the following icon.



On long trips either keep windows slightly open or open windows frequently to ventilate with fresh air. There would be a risk, however, if someone else is driving you. You can decrease this risk if you both wear a mask, stay in the backseat and allow for the vehicle to be well ventilated.

### E. Social and Family Visits

The safest way to visit relatives is:

- ✓ Organising the meeting to take place at the home of the person at risk of complications, preferably in an outdoor area of the house e.g. yard, roof, terrace
- ✓ Limiting the duration of contact
- ✓ Wearing a facemask by everyone, at all times
- ✓ Maintaining an adequate physical distance from your relatives/visitors
- ✓ Limiting the number of visits and number of persons from different households who visit you in a week. For example, if you have two children do not organise one big family visit, instead meet one family at a time which is different from the visit by the other family.

The larger the number of persons and the more persons from different households you meet, the larger your risk that one of these could be a person who is COVID positive without symptoms.

## F. Taking care of young children

**It should be the persons at risk of complications from COVID-19 infection who should freely decide to take care of young children if this constitutes essential support to their family. They should not be obliged or feel obliged if they are not comfortable with taking care of young children. Families should understand that taking care of children who come into regular contact with other children does carry an increased risk since children have multiple social contacts in different bubbles at schools, at childcare centres, on school transport, and at extracurricular activities (e.g. sport, ballet, MUSEUM etc).**

Taking care regularly of young children can be done safer if persons at risk of complications:

- ✓ form a support bubble with ONLY ONE other household. All those in a support bubble can spend time together inside each other's homes. You should only form a support bubble with one other household. Once formed, you should not change the members of the support bubble.
- ✓ limit the risk from exposure to young children by reducing contact time as much as possible, by following strict general, respiratory and hand hygiene principles, by wearing a mask or a mask and visor at all times, by respecting social distancing whenever possible and by avoiding all contact if there are symptoms of possible infection.

### ➤ Evaluation of various other activities

A number of criteria need to be considered when carrying an evaluation of each activity. These include the following:

- ✓ Typical distance between persons during this activity
- ✓ Whether the activity takes place indoors or outdoors
- ✓ Length of exposure for this activity
- ✓ The degree of physical contact
- ✓ Typical social contact time - the typical contact one has with other persons per hour of activity.
- ✓ Potential for creation of droplets or sprays
- ✓ Contact with persons who have travelled from countries with high rates of transmission

- ✓ The mitigation measures which could be implemented to minimize possibility of transmission of coronavirus

As shown in Annex 1, several activities were ranked according to level of risk to the individual and presume that recommended mitigating measures are implemented to reduce the risk for each activity. Mitigating measures are the measures which decrease transmission such as the adoption of specific minimum distances between restaurant tables, enhanced cleaning of frequently touched areas, strict appointment system (e.g. at hairdressers and beauticians) and the appropriate wearing of face masks amongst others.

Mitigation factors for each activity have been included in the guidance for several activities which can be found on [www.covid19health.gov.mt](http://www.covid19health.gov.mt)

It must be pointed out that the activities in Annex 1 are ranked with respect to the persons who are at risk of complications from COVID-19 infection, and not from a general population perspective. This illustration provides a quick guidance for persons at risk from COVID-19 infections when evaluating different options for activities that they wish to perform or join.

#### **Important points:**

- ✓ Get vaccinated against seasonal influenza
- ✓ Have your groceries/goods delivered ideally
- ✓ Discuss with your employer whether all or part of your duties can be carried out from home.
- ✓ When at the workplace you are to adhere to physical distancing measures, adequate hand hygiene, and use of mask when not with persons from the same household.
- ✓ Attend for your medical appointments with a facemask and carry and use hand sanitizer
- ✓ Maintaining good general, respiratory and hand hygiene and an adequate physical distance from others are the most important factors to protect yourself from infection
- ✓ There is a cumulative risk of exposure
- ✓ If you develop any symptoms of COVID call 111 for further guidance
- ✓ For further information regarding mitigation measures of a variety of activities please go to [www.covid19health.gov.mt](http://www.covid19health.gov.mt)

## Annex 1

Your risk of infection increases with the number of times and duration you carry out the activities below.  
Assess your needs and keep non-essential activities to a minimum.  
Use face masks at all times when not with persons from the same household.

Lowest  
Risk

- 
- Staying at home
  - Travelling on the Gozo ferry
  - Outdoor walks in open countryside / areas
  - Visiting shops/retail outlets/lotto booths
  - Going to shopping malls
  - Visiting museums and exhibitions
  - Going to an outdoor cinema
  - Going to an open-air theatre
  - Attending outdoor mass
  - Outdoor public/hotel pools
  - Visiting open-air markets
  - Hotels/B&Bs/Self-catering facilities
  - Using personal services e.g. nail technicians, beauticians, hairdressers
  - Outdoor restaurant and cafeterias
  - Individual outdoors exercise in a sports venue
  - Social/Family visits
  - Going to beaches
  - Using indoor public or hotel pools
  - Going to indoor restaurants and cafeterias
  - Contact with people attending childcare centres and kindergarten
  - Contact with people attending schools and educational institutions
  - Attending indoor mass
  - Using facilities in gaming and betting shops
  - Gymnasiums
  - Using facilities in bingo halls (Tombola)
  - Casinos
  - Going to a bar
  - Going to snack bars and clubs (Kazin/i)
  - Travelling abroad
  - Nightclubs/discotheques
  - Attending organised public events (e.g. festa) or other mass events

Highest  
Risk