

Regulatory response by HIQA and the Chief Inspector of Social Services to COVID-19

Tuesday, 10 March 2020: The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the Chief Inspector of Social Services recognise that Ireland's health and social care services are facing unprecedented challenges in their response to COVID-19 (coronavirus). Therefore, we are updating care providers and the public on our response to the situation.

We recognise that this is an evolving situation which is subject to ongoing review. Further updates will be issued when required.

Changes to inspection practice in nursing homes and other designated centres

Where there is no indication of COVID-19 in a designated centre or service, we will continue to inspect those services.

For now, all inspections of designated centres will be announced by telephone the day before, including those already announced. This is to establish in advance if there are any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 in centres or services.

We will be cancelling any routine inspections in centres and services where we have been notified of any suspected or confirmed incidence of COVID-19. In addition, all thematic inspections in older persons and disability centres have been cancelled until further notice.

Where we identify risk in a service where COVID-19 has been confirmed, and we believe an inspection is required, HIQA and the Chief Inspector and will follow public health advice in relation to any required precautions.

Inspections to inform registration decisions

We will:

- prioritise site inspections which may be requested to speed up the opening of a new designated centre or additional beds in a centre to support the additional demand being placed on the health and social care sector
- continue to progress the renewal of registration applications in line with our statutory responsibilities.

Risk-based inspections

We continue to carry out risk-based inspections and routine monitoring inspections of centres or services where there has been no COVID-19 notification received by

the Chief Inspector. However, we will tell the provider about the inspection the day before.

Inspection of children's services

Where there is no indication of COVID-19 in any of the centres or services monitored and inspected by HIQA, we will continue to inspect those services.

For now, all inspections will be announced by telephone the day before, including those already announced. This is to establish in advance if there are any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 in centres or services.

We will be cancelling any routine inspections in centres and services where we have been made aware of any suspected or confirmed incidence of COVID-19.

Where we identify risk in a service where COVID-19 has been confirmed, and we believe an inspection is required, HIQA will follow public health advice in relation to any required precautions. In addition, we will not conduct interviews with social work staff in hospital settings and are reviewing the convening of focus groups.

Healthcare and medical ionising radiation services

We have temporarily suspended routine program of monitoring inspections in hospital based services and inspection of all ionising radiation undertakings. We continue to respond to solicited and unsolicited information about services under our remit.

Notification of confirmed cases of COVID-19

Designated centres (such as nursing homes and residential centres for people with disabilities and special care units) are required to tell the Chief Inspector about any outbreak of a notifiable disease. COVID-19 is now a notifiable disease and, therefore, should be notified to us.

Services are reminded to use the NF02 notification form (available on our website and Provider Portal) to report incidents or outbreaks of COVID-19 to us.

In the interests of assisting public health authorities, registered providers of designated centres should notify us as soon as an incidence of COVID-19 infection is identified in a centre, rather than waiting for the three days as allowed in the regulations.

We would emphasise that providers and or persons in charge of designated centres **are not required** to notify us about measures to prevent or to manage incidents or outbreaks