



Covid 19 Managing the Workplace

Lesson 1: Covid 19 Background and Public Health Advice

Introduction

Hello and welcome to this lesson entitled “Covid-19 Background and Public Health Advice”

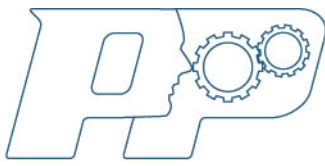
In this lesson we will examine:

- What the Covid-19 virus is
- We will examine how the virus spreads
- We will look at the most common symptoms of the virus.
- We will examine public health measures taken to deal with the virus and finally
- We will examine the Return to Work Safety Protocol prepared by the government.

What is Covid-19

A virus is a microscopic organism that can replicate only inside the cells of a host organism. Viruses infect all types of organisms, including humans, animals and plants. Some Human diseases caused by viruses include chickenpox, AIDS, Ebola, avian flu, cold sores, and the common cold.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which can cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).



The most recently discovered coronavirus Novel Coronavirus, causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. COVID-19 is now a pandemic affecting many countries globally.

Covid-19 is mainly a respiratory disease that attacks the lungs, making it harder for patients to breathe and get enough oxygen to the rest of the body. Pneumonia and other respiratory conditions can quickly set in, eventually leading to death if the body cannot fight off the infection.

The disease can also lead to increased stress and damage to the heart due to lack of oxygen provided by the lungs. There is also potential for blood clots to be formed damaging other organs in the body.

Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart and lung problems, diabetes, or cancer, are at higher risk of developing serious illness

How Covid-19 Spreads

The disease spreads primarily from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or speaks. These droplets are relatively heavy, so they do not travel far and quickly sink to the ground. People can catch COVID-19 if they breathe in these droplets from a person infected with the virus.

This is why it is important not to come into close contact with someone who has the virus and is coughing or sneezing. Close contact can mean more than 15 minutes face-to-face contact within 2 metres of an infected person

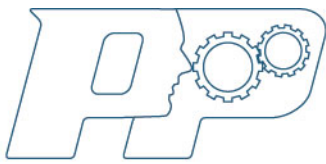
The droplets coughed or sneezed by an infected person can land on objects and surfaces around the person such as tables, doorknobs and handrails.

People can become infected-by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. This is why it is important to avoid touching these surfaces and to wash your hands regularly with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand rub.

The Symptoms of Covid-19

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

Fever – with a temperature exceeding 38degC



A dry cough

Shortness of breath

Fatigue

Other symptoms that are less common and may affect some patients include:

aches and pains,

nasal congestion,

headache,

conjunctivitis,

sore throat,

diarrhoea,

loss of taste or smell

or a rash on skin

or discoloration of fingers or toes.

These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but only have very mild symptoms.

Symptoms usually begin 2 to 14 days after you come into contact with the virus.

Public Health Measures

As cases of Covid-19 increased rapidly in China from late December 2019 and spread to South Korea, Singapore, Japan and then to Italy, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) advised countries to implement preparedness measures.

In Ireland, a National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) for COVID-19 was established on 27 January 2020 in the Department of Health, chaired by the Chief Medical Officer.

The NPHET oversees and provides national direction, guidance, support and expert advice on the development and implementation of a strategy to control the spread of COVID-19 in Ireland.

The strategy for dealing with Covid-19 involved phased health and community response actions aimed at reducing transmission rates. These phases are the:

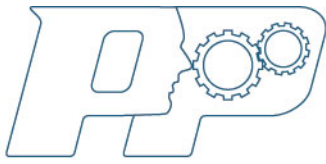
Containment phase:

In this phase, irrespective of case severity, all efforts are focused on identifying cases and their contacts early, in order to prevent further transmission (secondary spread).

This phase commenced in February 2020 with Covid-19 testing being set up and contact tracing. Modelling of the disease progress commenced.

Cases were mainly due to those returning from infected regions e.g. Northern Italy.

Decisions were taken to advise not to travel to infected regions and on 8th of March the decision was taken to cancel the St. Patrick's day festival.



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As cases spread and community transmission increased, the decision was taken by government based on NPHET advice to move to the delay phase.

Delay Phase:

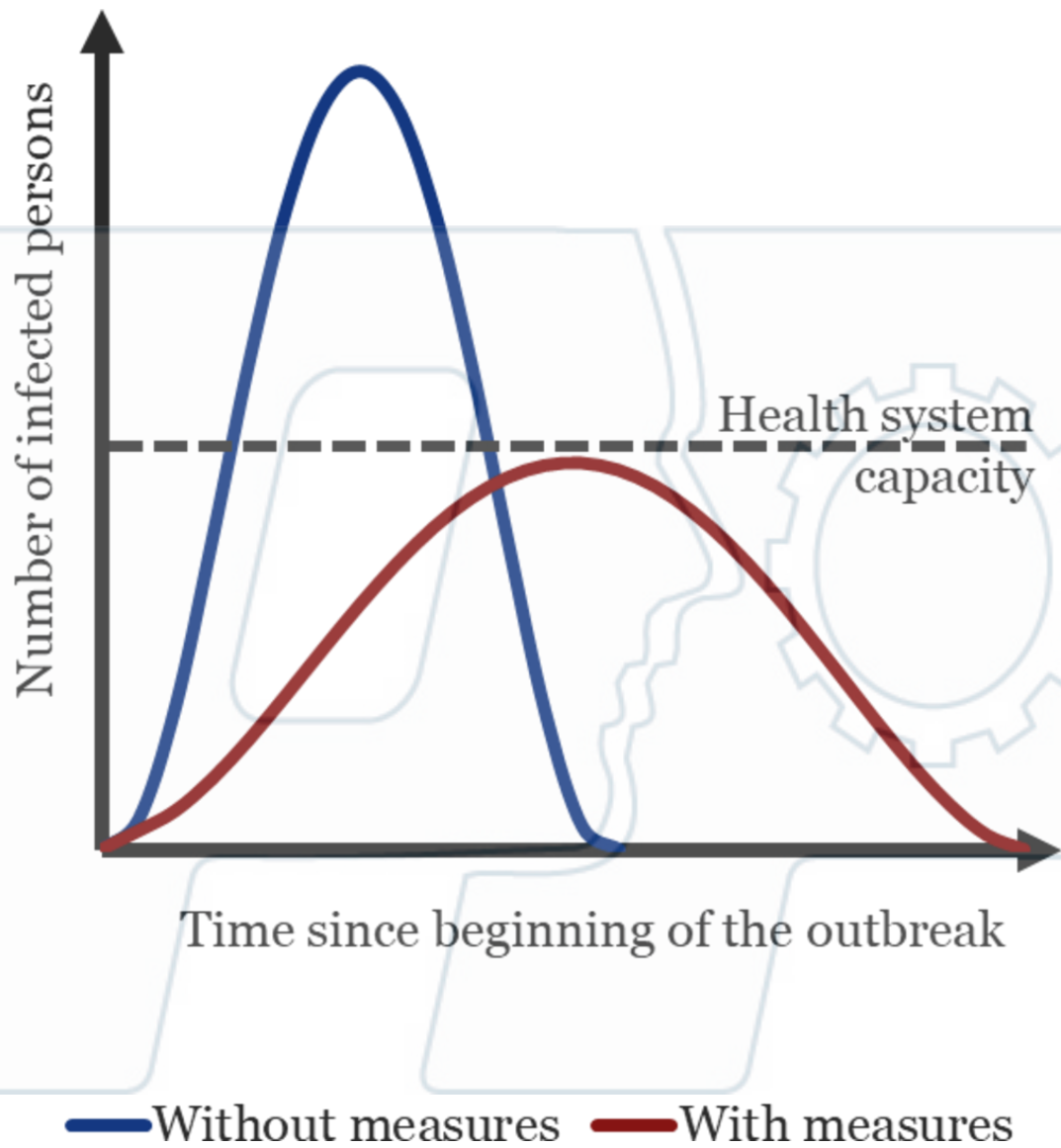
The delay strategy is planned to slow down the spread of the virus.

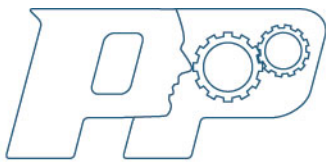
By keeping the rate of transmission lower, the amount of people attending hospitals and requiring intensive care services is reduced.

This prevents the health service becoming swamped thus allowing better outcomes for Covid-19 patients.

By implementing restrictive measures around travel, work and isolation, rates of infection spread were lowered.

The idea of slowing a virus' spread so that fewer people need to seek treatment at any given time is known as "flattening the curve."





d. On the 13th of March, restrictions on mass gatherings, closure of schools, child care facilities, museums and tourist facilities took place.

On the 27th of March further restrictive measures were implemented including:

- Stay at home of all non-essential workers
- No public gatherings
- No travel beyond 2km of home
- Cocooning of the over 70s
- Strict social distancing

Greater legal powers were given to the Gardai to ensure widespread compliance. Testing and tracing capacity was greatly increased.

These restrictive measures were extended until the 17th of May.

Re-Opening

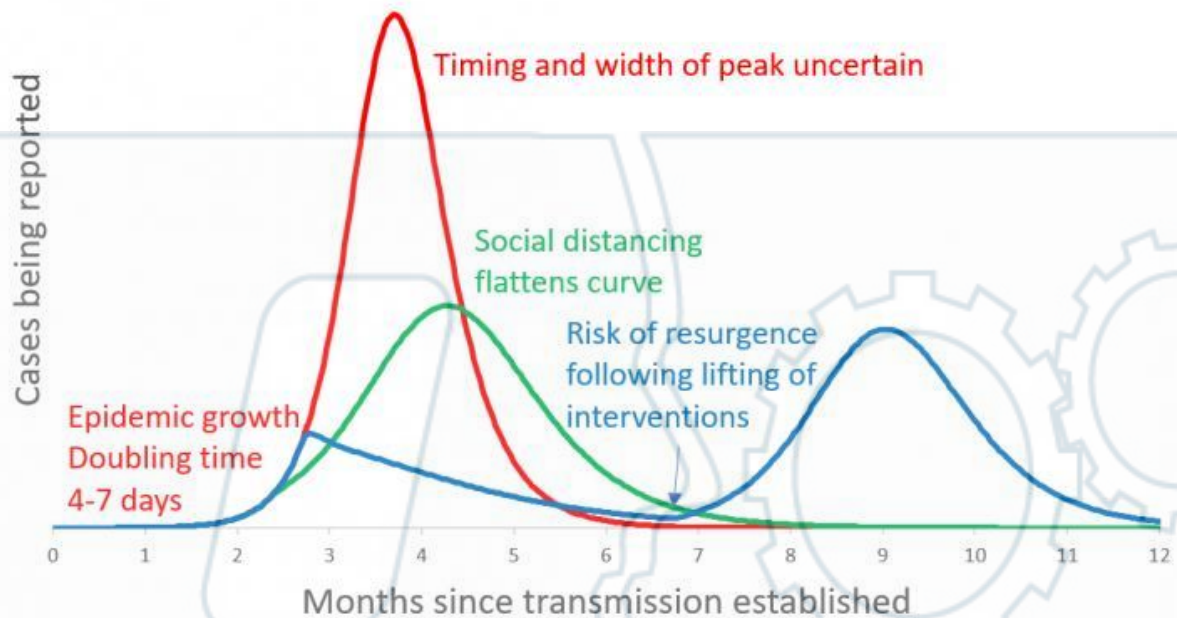
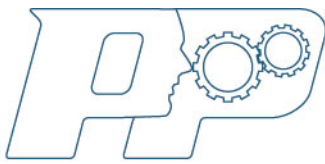
A key metric used by NPHET in measuring the success of the restrictions on the spread of Covid-19 is the reproductive rate or the RE number.

The RE number refers to how many other people somebody with Covid-19 infects.

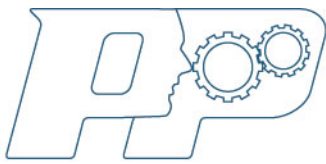
The target set was to bring the RE number to below 1.

Having this in place for a period of time allowed NPHET to plan for lifting the restrictive measures on a phased basis.

On 1st of May the government published the “Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business”. This outlined the phased lifting of restrictions in society allowing businesses and communities to return to operation whilst ensuring that the risks of Covid-19 resurgence was monitored.



The first of the 5 phases was to commence on the 18th of May.
If resurgence of the disease was controlled further restrictions would be lifted with the 5th phase being implemented on the 10th of August.
Central to this roadmap was the phased return to work of business operations.



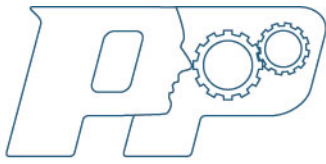
On the 8th of May the government published the “Return to Work Safely Protocol”. This document is designed to support employers and workers to put measures in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. These measures should be put in place for the business based on the operational risks of Covid-19 infection within the workplace. The measure should be planned and implemented based on the phased reopening timeline.

Return to Work Safety Protocol

The Return to Work Safety Protocol describes the steps that employers and workers shall take in order to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

These steps include:

1. Develop and/or update the COVID-19 Response Plan
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. Implement the COVID-19 prevention and control measures to minimise risk to workers



Summary

In this lesson we examined:

- What the Covid-19 virus is
- We examined how the virus spreads
- We looked at the most common symptoms of the virus.
- We looked at the public health measures taken to deal with the virus and finally
- We outlined the steps in the Return to Work Safety Protocol.