

## **Statement from An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar on Covid-19**

Good morning,

I need to speak to you about Coronavirus and Covid19.

For the past few weeks, the Government and our public services have been focused on the impact of the virus.

In that time, we have taken several important and unprecedented measures to protect public health.

We have been preparing for all eventualities.

Yesterday, the World Health Organisation formally described it as pandemic and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) updated its guidelines advising us all to act early to be effective.

Our own National Public Health Emergency Team met last night and has issued new advice to Government. We are acting on that advice today.

There will be many more cases.

More people will get sick and unfortunately, we must face the tragic reality that some people will die.

The virus is all over the world. It will continue to spread but it can be slowed. Its impact can be reduced making it easier for our health service to cope and giving our scientists more time to develop better testing, treatments and a vaccine.

It is important to remember that the disease effects will be mild for the majority of people especially the young and healthy.

We know that older people and those with chronic diseases are at real risk. We have a duty as a society to protect ourselves and above all to protect others - our parents and

grandparents, our family and friends, co-workers and neighbours.

We have not witnessed a pandemic of this nature in living memory. This is uncharted territory.

We said we would take the right actions at the right time.

We have to move now to have the greatest impact.

So, from 6pm today, the following measures are being put in place. They will stay in place until March 29th.

Schools, colleges, and childcare facilities will close from tomorrow. Where possible, teaching will be done on-line or remotely. Cultural institutions will close.

Our advice is that all indoor mass gatherings of more than 100 people and outdoor mass gatherings of more than 500 people should be cancelled.

Arrangements are being made to ensure that everyone entering Ireland through our ports and airports is fully informed and self-isolates if they develop symptoms.

You should continue to go to work if you can but where possible should work from home. In order to reduce unnecessary face to face interaction in the workplace, break times and working times should be staggered and meetings done remotely or by phone.

Public transport will continue to operate.

The shops will remain open and we have plans to ensure that supply chains will not be interrupted.

We need the public and businesses to take a sensible and level-headed responsible approach.

Restaurants, cafes and other businesses can stay open but should look at ways that they can

implement the public health advice on social distancing.

As a general rule, outside of work people should seek to reduce social interactions as much as possible.

You can play your part by hand washing, coughing and sneezing into your elbow, and seeking medical advice if you develop symptoms. This is now more important than ever.

The Cabinet will meet later today.

Opposition party leaders and our counterparts in Northern Ireland and Britain will be briefed.

In the period ahead, the Government will deploy all the resources we can muster, human and financial, to tackle this threat head-on. Those resources are extensive but not unlimited.

Healthcare workers have been at the forefront of this crisis since it started. They will be at the frontline of the crisis in the time ahead. We must do all we can to help them, so they can help those who need help the most.

I know that some of this is coming as a real shock and it is going involve big changes in the way we live our lives.

I know that I am asking people to make enormous sacrifices.

We're doing it for each other.

Together, we can slow the virus in its tracks and push it back.

Acting together, as one nation, we can save many lives.

Our economy will suffer. It will bounce back.

Lost time in school or college will be recovered. In time, our lives will go back to normal.

Above all, we all need to look out for each other.

Ireland is a great nation. And we are great people. We have experienced hardship and struggle before. We have overcome many trials in the past with our determination and our spirit.

We will prevail.