



IASLT

**Returning to Face to Face
Contacts: Framework to support
decision making**

IASLT COVID-19

A working document: Version 2

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Section 1: Introduction

The Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists (IASLT) acknowledges the additional challenges the current COVID-19 global pandemic brings for our members. Members have faced challenges in the delivery of direct face-to-face care to service users and have proactively managed this through changes to work practices and alternative modes of service delivery to ensure service user and clinician safety. Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) have been working hard to promote the safety and protection of themselves, their service users, and their colleagues at all times by adhering to guidance regarding government restrictions in a time of emergency.

The government published a 'Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19' in November 2020. However newly identified variants of COVID-19 with higher transmission rates meant that the situation with COVID-19 evolved rapidly with information being constantly updated. The government published a Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business on the 1st of May 2020, which set out the plan to ease the COVID-19 restrictions and reopen Ireland's economy and society in a phased manner. The Work Safely Protocol is a revision of the Return to Work Safely Protocol published in May 2020. The revised Protocol incorporates the current advice on the Public Health measures needed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community and workplaces as issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), the Department of Health and Government. The Protocol is a general document applicable to all sectors. It sets out the minimum measures required in every place of work to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to facilitate the re-opening of workplaces following temporary closures and the ongoing safe operation of those workplace.

IASLT advises members to keep up to date with government updates here: gov.ie/covid

We appreciate that there is significant planning and organisation required to operate services with the challenges of COVID-19, especially in view of the fact that the new model may have to be in place for a significant period of time, until restrictions such as social distancing can be fully lifted. While the IASLT cannot direct members, either collectively or individually, to open or close their services, it advises that the fundamental determining factor is whether you can provide an essential service while **adhering to the current government guidelines** and **HSE guidelines on infection**

control and decontamination. As government guidelines change, services should re-evaluate any changes that may be possible to service delivery without compromising safety and adhere to local advice. In order for **IASLT member insurance** (fitness to practice and professional indemnity to be valid should a future claim arise, all members must adhere to IASLT guidelines and standards of practice including all guidance issued in the context of COVID-19.

It is important that IASLT members continue to use their **professional and clinical judgement** to assess what is **safe and effective practice** for themselves, service users and others, in the context in which they are working during the pandemic.

1.1 Key messages

- IASLT members must abide by IASLTs Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics and Scope of Practice.
- In order for **IASLT member insurance** (fitness to practice and professional indemnity insurance) to be valid should a future claim arise all members must adhere to IASLT guidelines and standards of practice including all guidance issued in the context of COVID-19.
- A full **risk assessment** of the working environment for which you are responsible must be undertaken and documented, and you must **demonstrate** that all measures designed to mitigate risk and fulfil obligations are in place.
- You must follow Irish COVID-19 **infection prevention and control (IPC)** guidelines.
- Whilst the majority of members will have received their **COVID-19 vaccination** members must continue to adhere to **infection prevention and control guidelines while the vaccination program is ongoing and in line with public health guidance.**
- You must use appropriate **personal protective equipment (PPE)** and have systems and policies in place that govern its use.
- You must undertake a **risk assessment** and make a clinically reasoned decision for offering either a face-to-face or remote consultation for each client. You must document your rationale for these decisions.

- You must **engage your clients in discussions** regarding the rationale for remote or face-to-face consultations. If both parties deem it necessary to proceed with face-to-face care, the client should be made aware of all current risks associated with this approach. They must give their consent and you must document these discussions and the outcome in the person's SLT file.
- Engage in regular communication with colleagues to remain abreast of local issues, information and changes, and to provide support.
- Receive training and/or support to ensure practice is safe and effective.
- Use professional judgement to assess what is safe and effective practice in context.

1.2 CORU

Members must work within the legal, regulatory and professional frameworks that guide the safe management of clients, the safety of the wider public and everyone who works with you. Speech and language therapists must comply with the CORU Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics and they must also comply with the CORU Standards of Proficiency for SLTs. CORU recognises that these times may require temporary changes to normal practice. CORU advises that, as a CORU registrant, the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for our profession will continue to guide and assist us, regardless of where we are working.

CORU expects registrants to continue to act reasonably, responsibly and to be able to explain our actions and decisions if required. You can find CORU's COVID-19 updates here:

<https://www.coru.ie/health-and-social-care-professionals/covid-19-updates/covid-19-update/>

Section 2: Risk Assessment

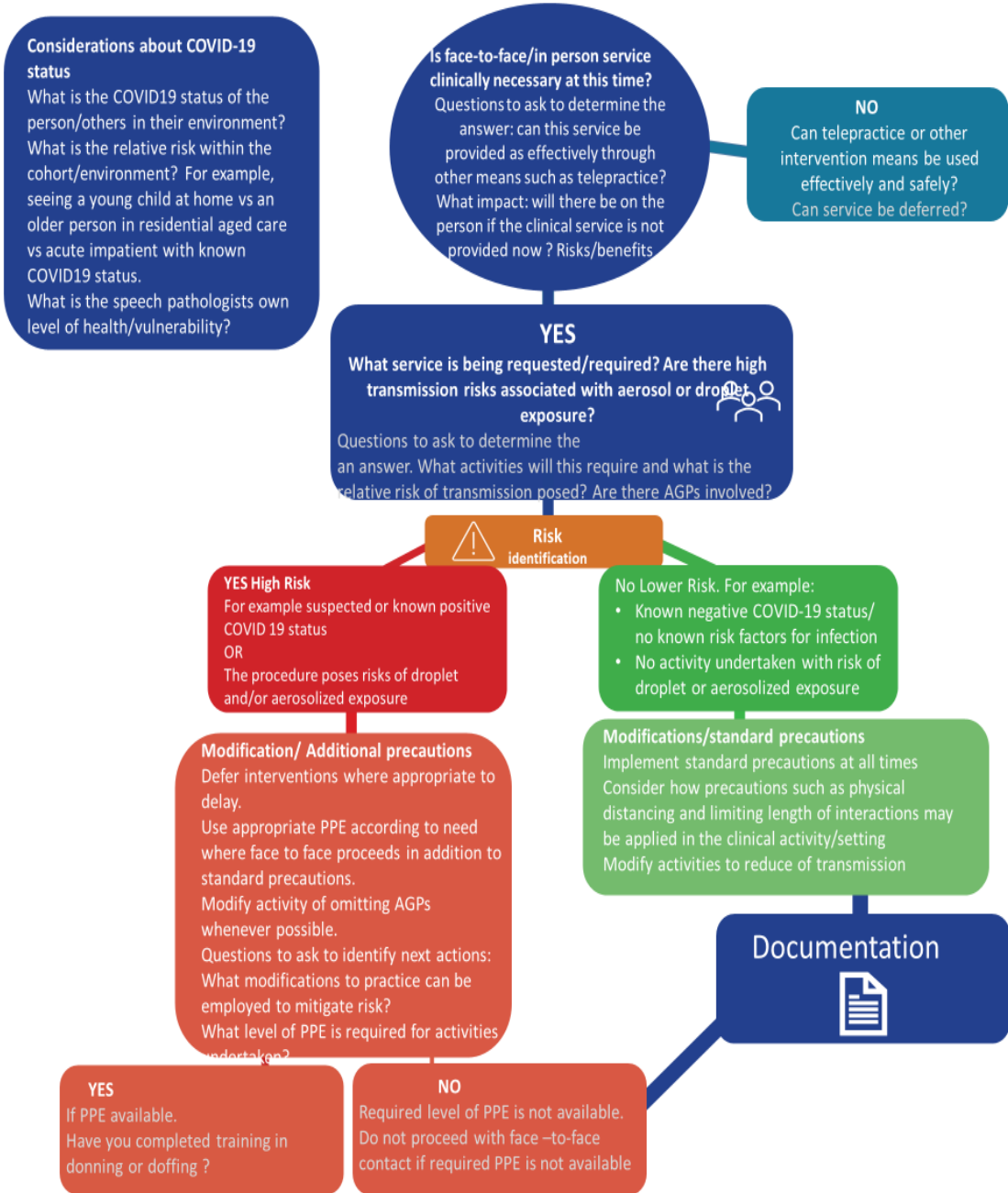
All practitioners should check the HSE website regularly to keep informed of up to date information and advice regarding COVID-19. We also encourage you to follow all guidelines issued and provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team. Services are obliged by the **Work Safely Protocol (updated Jan 2021)** to update health and safety statements by carrying out a risk assessment in relation to COVID-19. This assessment of risk will assist members to deliver safe services informed by the guidance, values and principles set out in relevant COVID-19 guidance documentation and in keeping with the CORU Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics.

In order to best inform your decision making, the assessment of risk in relation to the provision of a safe service can be assisted by using the HSE risk assessment templates which can be found here:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/safetywellbeing/healthsafetyand%20wellbeing/safetystatementsandriskassessments.html>

Speech and language therapists should utilise an SLT-specific risk assessment framework when considering how to proceed with providing services to their clients during this pandemic. Speech and language therapists need to use their expertise and judgement to apply a risk/ benefit decision making process for each individual client. A clinical risk assessment undertaken before provision of clinical services, should determine the appropriate actions to take in each case to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

The flowchart above outlines the triage and prioritisation process (Adopted from Speech Pathology Australia, 2020)



The following questions can be considered by the SLT in determining if face to face consultation is essential:

- ✓ What are the risks of not undertaking the assessment or intervention now? Is it urgent / can it be delayed?
- ✓ Is it clinically necessary to undertake this consultation face to face or can it be achieved safely and effectively remotely? E.g. telepractice.
- ✓ What are the risks of undertaking the intended specific activities with that specific client? – are the activities/client cohort low risk?
- ✓ What are the modifications that will further mitigate risk, e.g. is there access to appropriate PPE, can the parent/carer demonstrate the required activity?
- ✓ What are the risks to the health of the SLT?
- ✓ Is the patient suspected or confirmed COVID-19?
- ✓ Will the client be able to maintain required social distancing?
- ✓ Will the client be able to cope with SLT wearing PPE?
- ✓ Will the client be able to engage in modified practice?
- ✓ Will the client be able to attend the appointment accompanied by one parent/carer only and if not, what additional health and safety measures need to be employed?

As part of the initial risk assessment it is the responsibility of the SLT to risk assess to identify the level of infection prevention and control precautions needed including the choice of appropriate PPE for those who need to be present. If more than one task is anticipated, with differing risks, the higher level of precautions should be taken for all of the tasks. If the need for PPE is identified, however appropriate PPE is not available, **the clinical interaction should not proceed.**

Risk assessment prior to face to face consultation

If the triage and prioritisation process indicate that a face to face consultation is necessary, the SLT conducts a Risk assessment within 24 hours of the scheduled appointment (see sample in Appendix 2). This Risk assessment will determine whether or not it is appropriate for the client to attend for a face to face appointment.

Section 3: Attending the SLT service

3.1 PPE

The IASLT cannot give specific guidance on the type and extent of PPE members may need to use in their individual practice setting and circumstances.

Speech and Language Therapists must be aware of and trained in the procedures for **donning and doffing** PPE in such a way as to safely mitigate the risk of contamination, and they should be familiar with decontamination and safe waste disposal procedures. National and local guidance should be available to inform the SLT's practice.

HSE PPE videos:

https://youtu.be/I5S_n_BpTKk

<https://youtu.be/PZtL8HtfuOM>

<https://youtu.be/BEbcuqWF-oE>

Where face to face work is necessary, SLTs should take account of government and HSE advice on physical distancing and minimising the spread of infection. Members must follow up to date government guidance on PPE, when seeing patients face-to-face. Members providing services in domiciliary, clinic and residential settings will need to consider what protective equipment is appropriate for the type of service they offer. Having access to the appropriate PPE that is suitable for both the clinical environment and intervention must be a deciding factor on whether to proceed with a face-to-face contact.

See PPE Guidance:

- <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/news/coronavirus/prevent-the-spread-of-coronavirus-in-the-workplace.html>
- <https://www.hpsc.ie/a/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/healthandsocialcareworkers/Guidance-HealthSocialCareWorkersWhoVisitHomes.pdf>

Clear Face Masks

Only approved PPE should be used in speech and language therapy clinics.

The IASLT is supportive of investigating the procurement and use of clear face masks where appropriate as part of PPE provision. This mask will need to have the required levels of protection as part of the manufacture. IASLT issued a joint statement with IAA in November 2020 where we urgently requested the Department of Health to commence the procurement of clear protective face masks to support people with communication difficulties. IASLT continues to liaise with HSE procurement on this issue.

There is a communication challenge for all regarding reduced clarity and audibility while wearing PPE, and all of us who are sighted make use of lip reading and facial expressions to communicate. Several information leaflets have been circulated on social media supporting members and the general public to be aware of the challenges to effective communication posed by face masks and strategies that can be employed to manage this.

Clothing

Regardless of location of work and where appropriate, all SLTs should follow procedures for the safe management of linen, including uniforms. HSE guidance on COVID-19: infection prevention and control guidance contain information on staff uniforms, which can also be applied to everyday clothing.

Challenges attending SLT appointments under the COVID-19 restrictions

The IASLT recognises that for some individuals, the appearance of others in PPE may cause distress. The IASLT recognises that for some individuals attending SLT appointments under COVID restrictions may cause distress. Buildings may look different to pre COVID, there may be distancing restrictions, staff may be wearing PPE, there may be new hygiene protocols, waiting areas may be restricted, toy areas may be out of bounds. Those attending appointments may be required to wear masks/face coverings to appointments in line with the recommended guidance campaign on wearing masks in the community. Younger children, as well as individuals with conditions that may make it difficult for them to understand the need for PPE, including autism, intellectual disability, and dementia may be impacted.

To reduce the person's level of distress and help them feel more comfortable with PPE, it could be helpful to place photographs of who is wearing the PPE or write the name and role on the apron. Ways to support personalisation for children may include use of, for example, a favourite cartoon character. Preparing the person for the appointment will be key to its success. Many SLTs will be instrumental in

developing accessible resources to help individuals understand the reasons why their SLT appointment looks and feel different to before – including the development of easy read information and videos.

SLTs are advised to assess the urgency of any contact with individuals for whom the new set-ups may be significantly distressing and again to weigh up the risk/benefit of proceeding.

3.2 Social distancing

In keeping with current government guidance, social distancing and minimal contact with others must be observed within the healthcare context, wherever possible, in order to reduce virus transmission. If SLTs are unable to physically distance more than 2 metres apart from other colleagues, it is advised to follow local infection control guidelines; e.g. if there is a requirement to wear a face covering to reduce the transmission of the virus. This applies to office settings as well as clinical environment.

Within the Building

Local standard operating policies will apply in relation to service users entering and leaving the buildings from which SLT services are delivered. It is the responsibility of each SLT to comply with same.

Within the SLT Clinic

- ✓ Ensure the clinic room space affords for physical distancing, for all those in attendance (where physical distancing is clinically appropriate).
- ✓ Routine cleaning of room and equipment between consultations (SAS-Cov-2 can survive on surfaces for up to 5 days)/
- ✓ Perform appropriate hand hygiene.
- ✓ Clean and reprocess any equipment that is shared between clients. Do not use any equipment that has no protective cover or cannot be disinfected appropriately or discarded after use (e.g. microphone).
- ✓ Ask clients to use hand sanitiser before entering and when exiting the consult room.
- ✓ Use a contactless payment system, where possible and if relevant.
- ✓ Use single patient use/disposable items where possible (e.g. disposable cups, spoons.)
- ✓ Handle and dispose of waste safely.
- ✓ Follow respiratory and cough etiquette.
- ✓ The SLT must have access to the necessary PPE and cleaning agents within their clinic room.

This is not an exhaustive list and each SLT must reflect on the needs of their own

setting and follow local guidance accordingly.

If a client feels unwell during a session, please adhere to the following advice:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/videoresources/gpprimarycaresettingcovid-19videoresources/>

Members are advised to consult the following guidance also:

Return to Work Safely Protocol COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers

3.3 Modifications to practice

- ✓ The duration of the face to face appointment should be kept to a minimum.
- ✓ To facilitate this, the SLT should gather case history information from the client and relevant professionals prior to the appointment.
- ✓ Feedback on the client's session can be provided by telephone at a time agreed after the face to face appointment.
- ✓ If clients opt not to accept face to face appointments local departmental guidelines will apply.
- ✓ Standard COVID 19 Precautions: Standard precautions should be used with all clients as much as possible. This may include:
 - Maintain physical distancing for all consultations, where clinically indicated.
 - Sit/stand beside the patient rather than across from the patient/
 - If Perspex is provided, then sitting across from the client is appropriate. The Perspex screen will need to be large enough to prevent air droplets from moving over or around the divider.
 - Encourage clients to feed themselves or have parents/carers feed children where possible.
 - Use a facilitator for formal assessment as per advice.

Please consult **IASLT COVID-19 Guidance 5th Update**

3.4 Standardised assessments:

- ✓ It is imperative that members record all decision making in relation to assessment.
- ✓ Be mindful of the impact of the requirement for social distancing on how assessments are administered during face to face assessments.
- ✓ Observation rooms should be utilised or video options to limit number persons within the room and to ensure physical distancing.
- ✓ If assessments/resources are used across sites or teams, protocol to ensure pre- and post-sanitisation should be established.
- ✓ Make a clinical judgment, about whether or not you are able to gather the examinee's best performance.
- ✓ Report your clinical decision(s) in your report and comment on the factors that led to the decision to report (or not report) the scores.

3.5 Documentation

Documentation should be completed in the client's clinical file to indicate that clinical procedures have been modified and varied as part of risk management approach to COVID-19 pandemic.

3.6 Consent

SLTs should document in the client's clinical record that risks have been discussed and that the client gives consent or not for treatment to proceed with a face-to-face consultation. *Informed consent should now include reference to COVID-19 and compliance with any obligations.*

3.7 Staff Wellbeing

IASLT recognises that while members have been hugely flexible in responding to the COVID crisis that this has also been a challenge in new learning, new work conditions and finding new ways to meet service user needs.

Investing in supports that enable our members to continue to provide quality services means investing in their health and wellbeing. Individual SLTs, their managers and employees all have responsibility to promote staff health and wellbeing.

This should include ensuring access to regular supervision (including telesupervision), training on new ways of working, supporting ongoing CPD, providing opportunities for debriefing and checking-in

with staff regarding their work/life balance and their ability to cope with these significant changes and stressors.

The SLT workforce is a valuable resource that has contributed significantly to the national COVID response and the wellbeing of Members must continue to be a priority into the future. The Psychological Society of Ireland have a range of resources for healthcare workers that may be helpful: <https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/footer/COVID19-Resources>

Section 4: CONCLUSION

The IASLT Council would like to thank the members of the Working Group on Return to Work during the COVID-19 Pandemic for compiling this guidance document for members. The group members were: IASLT Professional Development Manager Edel Dunphy and the following IASLT members:

Faye Godsell, Deirdre Kiernan, Emily Ahern and Anne Tangney.

If members have any feedback on this document please share it with us by forwarding it to professionaldevelopment@iaslt.ie

REFERENCES

- **Speech Pathology Australia**
[https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/SPAweb/About_us/COVID-19_News_and_Information/COVID-19 -
_Guidance for Service Delivery/SPAweb/About Us/COVID-19/Guidance for Service Delivery.aspx?hkey=fc19a880-e7a8-4246-8631-a474fc43d4ae](https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/SPAweb/About_us/COVID-19_News_and_Information/COVID-19_-_Guidance_for_Service_Delivery/SPAweb/About_Us/COVID-19/Guidance_for_Service_Delivery.aspx?hkey=fc19a880-e7a8-4246-8631-a474fc43d4ae)
- **IASLT (2020) IASLT COVID-19 Guidance (3rd version) published 28th April 2020**
- **AOTI (2020) Return to Work Guidelines**
- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/22829a-return-to-work-safely-protocol/>

APPENDIX 1: Resources

- **HSE Resources:**

- <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

- https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/dealing-with-fake-health-information-during-the-coronaviruspandemic.html?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_content=220420

- The HSE's **Health Protection Surveillance Centre** is regularly updating guidance for healthcare workers in Ireland: [https://www.hpsc.ie/a-](https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/guidanceforhealthcareworkers/)

- [z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/guidanceforhealthcareworkers/](https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/guidanceforhealthcareworkers/)

- The *European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control* (ECDC) has helpful resources:

- Infographic on hand washing:

- <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/poster-effective-hand-washing>

- Infographic on how to minimise the spread of the virus:

- <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/search?f%5B0%5D=diseases%3A2942>

- **Posters to display at your clinic/workplace**

- There are also some posters developed by the HSE and HPSC which may be of help for your practices: COVID-19 Posters, Hand hygiene poster (PDF, 129KB, 1 page)

- <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/posters/>

- WHO infection control signage for patients and travellers – downloads are available in multiple languages:

- <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>

- **WHO Resources**

- World Health Organization (2020) Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) technical guidance on infection prevention and control:

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/infection-prevention-and-control>.

APPENDIX 2: Telephone Risk assessment for clients prior to Face to Face Appointment

Please phone client / carer /guardian within 24 hours prior to face to face contact and ask the following questions:

Client Name: _____ DOB: _____ MRN : _____ SLT Name: _____ Date: _____
--

Questions	Yes	No
Have you (or your child) had any symptoms of: breathlessness, cough, nasal discharge, frequent sneezing, diarrhoea or changes in your taste and smell, which are new in the last 14 days?		
Have you (or your child) had a temperature or fever in the last 14 days?		
Are you (or your child) awaiting a test or results of a test for COVID-19?		
Is there anybody self-isolating in your house at the moment?		
Have you (or your child) been in contact with a person confirmed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days?		
Have you travelled abroad within the last 14 days?		

If the answer to any of these questions is YES then it is not appropriate for the face to face appointment to take place and should be deferred for 14 days.

SLT to make arrangements for same.

Adopted from *Adapted from Algorithm Version 3.1 15/03/20* www.hpsc.ie

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE APPOINTMENT LETTER

Clinic address

Parent(s)/ Guardian of:

Date:

Dear Parent(s),

A speech and language therapy appointment has been arranged for _____

On: At: In: With:
--

If you are unable to attend the appointment, please contact our department on (telephone number).

Please find attached an information leaflet on “Covid-19 and your speech and language therapy appointment”. It is important that you read this leaflet carefully and follow the guidelines.

If you (or your child) is experiencing an illness such as flu-like symptoms, chickenpox, vomiting or diarrhoea at the time of this appointment, please telephone to rearrange your appointment.

It is departmental policy that a legal guardian accompanies their child to speech and language therapy appointments. If, in exceptional circumstances, you are unable to bring your child to the SLT appointment, you must contact the therapist to discuss who will accompany the child instead. If you have not made contact with the SLT, he/she will not be able to proceed with the appointment.

Yours sincerely,

Speech and Language Therapist
CORU Registration Number

APPENDIX 4: COVID-19 INFORMATION LEAFLET

Covid-19 and your Speech and Language Therapy Appointment

You will have received an appointment to attend the Speech and Language Therapy Dept. To minimise the risk of community transmission of Covid-19 there are a few things we would ask you to do before you attend your appointment and on the day of your appointment.

Please **do not attend** if you, your child, or anyone that resides in your household, have/had any of the following symptoms over the last 14 days:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath/ breathing difficulties
- Recent changes in sense of smell and taste

Please **do not attend** if you are awaiting testing for Covid-19 or awaiting results.

Please **do not attend** if you, your child, or any member of your household, has been advised to self-isolate.

In these instances, it is advisable that the appointment is deferred until the household is symptom free for 14 days. Please contact us on (telephone number) to reschedule your appointment.

The day before your appointment, we will contact you to ask you some questions to make sure it is safe for you to attend. You will need to complete these questions before we can see you in the clinic.

The day of your appointment

- Please arrange for only one parent/ guardian to accompany the child to their appointment. Please do not bring siblings.
- If you are arriving by car, please stay in your car and wait for your therapist to phone you to let you know when to enter the building.

- If you are arriving by bus or on foot, please arrive no more than 5 minutes ahead of your time of your appointment. The therapist will phone you at the time of your appointment to let you know you can enter the building.
- We will have cleaned the clinic room and any equipment before your arrival.
- On entering and leaving the clinic room we will ask you to sanitise your hands.
- We will try to maintain social distancing guidelines where possible, within the clinic room.
- To minimise the infection risk for you and for your therapist, we will try to keep the face to face session shorter than usual.
- These precautions will not affect the high standard of care that we provide.

Coronavirus COVID-19



Coronavirus
COVID-19
Public Health
Advice

Help prevent coronavirus



Wash your
hands



Cover mouth if
coughing or sneezing



Avoid touching
your face



Keep surfaces
clean



Stop shaking
hands and hugging



Keep a safe
distance

The virus spreads in sneeze and cough droplets, so regularly taking the above measures helps reduce the chance of it spreading.

Visit [HSE.ie](https://www.hse.ie)

For updated factual information and advice
Or call 1850 24 1850

Protection from coronavirus.
It's in our hands.



Riailtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



 IRISH ASSOCIATION OF SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPISTS
COVID-19 May 2021

Step 1

- Please arrive for your Speech and Language Therapy appointment **no more than 5 minutes** before your appointment time

Step 2

- **Please wait for the Speech and Language Therapist to phone you before entering the building**
- Remember to take your mobile phone with you

Step 3

- Once you have spoken to the Speech and Language Therapist please enter the building
- We will meet you at the entrance.

Remember to wash your hands, keep 2 metre distance apart and cough/ sneeze into your elbow.