

Cocooning for people with severe asthma and COPD

The HSE has identified groups which are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill upon contracting COVID-19. If you fall within this group it does not mean that you are more likely to catch the virus, but you may experience more severe symptoms or be in need of more intensive treatment with the coronavirus.

People over 70 and people with certain underlying medical conditions have been identified as extremely medically vulnerable; this includes people with chronic lung diseases such as severe asthma and COPD. The Asthma Society has developed a working definition of severe asthma. If you are unsure if your asthma is severe, contact your local GP over the phone.

Cocooning

As advised by the government, people with severe asthma and COPD required to cocoon until at least May 5th. This time period will be reviewed and could be extended depending on developments. All people with severe asthma and COPD have been identified as extremely medically vulnerable by the HSE and need to take steps to protect themselves during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Cocooning is a measure set out by the government to protect those most at risk. Cocooning means restricting your contact with people and remaining within your home insofar as possible. This minimises your risk of becoming infected.

Here are some guidelines on how to successfully cocoon in your home:

Do:

- ✓ Stay within your home and avoid face-to-face contact for the allocated two week period
- ✓ Strictly avoid any contact with people exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19
- ✓ Arrange for medicines, food, and essential items to be delivered to your home
- ✓ Go out in your garden or balcony and get fresh air
- ✓ Remain active within your home as much as possible
- ✓ Stay in touch with family and friends online
- ✓ Keep your phone or devices charged and with credit to ensure you can make contact in an emergency
- ✓ Contact your GP, pharmacy or any essential service over the phone

Don't:

- ✗ Go outside your home or garden
- ✗ Have visitors within the home other than essential carers
- ✗ Go shopping for medications, food or essentials yourself
- ✗ Attend social gatherings of any kind including weddings or family events

Cocooning while living with others

Some people identified within the vulnerable group may be living with friends, family, or within a shared space which can make cocooning sound more daunting. Here is some advice for those required to cocoon while living with others:

Do:

- ✓ Communicate your situation to those you live with and ask for their support; encourage them to wash their hands regularly with disinfectant soap and warm water
- ✓ Access supports to have food, medicines, and essentials delivered to the home
- ✓ Avoid face-to-face contact with others in the home and distance yourself physically
- ✓ Ensure there is sufficient ventilation and air flow in your living space
- ✓ If you share a room, ensure there is at least one meter between you at all times. Ideally allow for two meters between people sharing rooms
- ✓ Where possible, use your own bathroom
- ✓ If you share a bathroom, consider creating up a cleaning and usage rota to minimise contact
- ✓ Similarly for kitchen use; create a rota for cooking and cleaning where possible
- ✓ Clean all surfaces regularly with disinfectant cleaning products; this can include door handles, counters, phones, toilets, tables, bedside lockers and any other surfaces
- ✓ Keep in contact with those your living with, family, and friends over the phone or with technology

Don't

- ✗ Share items such as towels, cutlery, or plates
- ✗ Go to shops yourself for medication, food or essentials
- ✗ Engage in a shared meal time with household members

It can be difficult to implement social distancing within your own home. Communicate your needs to the people you are living with, encourage good hand hygiene and regularly disinfect surfaces as often as possible to minimise the risk of infection.

Keeping well while Cocooning

Cocooning can be a straining experience. Take proactive steps to protect your physical and mental health during your time cocooning.

Take care of your asthma and COPD

It is vital that you manage your asthma and COPD well during Covid-19 to avoid any unnecessary exacerbations. Continue to take any prescribed medication or inhalers as required. Download an Asthma Action Plan from asthma.ie and fill it out over the phone with your GP or with a specialised respiratory nurse. Be aware of your triggers also at this time and put measures in place to protect yourself.

Take care of your mental health

While cocooning may be necessary to protect your physical health, it can take a toll on your mental health. Drastic changes to your routine, level of social interaction, and physical activity can be stressful and daunting. Take active steps to protect your mental health while you prepare to cocoon. Ensure you

get fresh air and exercise where possible. Keep connected with friends and family over the phone and with technology. Engage in meaningful activities such as painting, gardening, listening to music.

If you feel a strain on your mental health, access support available through your family, friends, and specialist organisations such as the Samaritans who are still operating their services during this time. Freephone the Samaritans at 116 123.

Please visit the HSE website to find a number of mental health services available over the phone or online during COVID-19: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/news/supports-and-services-during-covid-19.html>

Living with someone who is cocooning

Here are some guidelines to help you support someone who is cocooning:

Do:

- ✓ Restrict movements outside of the home
- ✓ Avoid face-to-face contact with the person who is cocooning
- ✓ Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and warm water
- ✓ Disinfect surfaces within the home regularly, specifically shared spaces such as bathrooms
- ✓ Where possible, assign a bathroom specifically to be used by the person cocooning. If this is not possible, then assign a rota for bathroom use and disinfect surfaces regularly
- ✓ Ensure they have enough medications or essential items
- ✓ Where possible, cook for the person
- ✓ Wash dishes in a dishwasher if this is not possible, use hot soapy water
- ✓ Allocate them specific dishes, cutlery and towels
- ✓ Wear gloves when removing dirty dishes, rubbish, or laundry
- ✓ Ensure their room is well ventilated
- ✓ Communicate regularly with the person cocooning using technology

Don't:

- ✗ Enter their living space
- ✗ Share items such as plates, cutlery, towels, or food
- ✗ Hand items directly to the person cocooning: leave them at the door
- ✗ Allow visitors in the home

People who are required to cocoon are at a higher risk of becoming severely unwell upon contracting COVID-19. If you are living with someone who is required to cocoon, encourage them to follow guidelines as strictly as possible to minimise their risk of infection.