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7<sup>th</sup> December 2020

**PQ 32877-20:** To ask the Minister for Health the most up-to-date definition of a close contact used within the school environment; and the details of changes and dates of changes to this definition.

**Dear Deputy Gannon,**

Please see below definitions extracted from Public Health Guidance on Management of COVID in Educational Facilities, available on: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/casedefinitions/covid-19educationalsettingscasesandclosecontactsdefinitions/>

**Case** - A confirmed case of Covid-19 notified to the Medical Officers of Health, HSE.

**Contact** - As per current HPSC close contacts guidelines a clinical Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) will be undertaken for all educational facilities where a confirmed case has attended whilst infectious. It is assumed because of the length of the school day, they will have been within a closed space for at least two hours.

**Close contacts definition** applied:

- Any person who has had face to face contact for <1m with a confirmed case of Covid-19 for >15 minutes in a school day.
- any person who has been between 1 and 2 metres from a confirmed case of Covid-19 for >15 minutes in a school day with consideration of other mitigation measures e.g. face-covering, pods, ventilation, IPC measures or uncertain compliance with mitigation measures in place (assessed through clinical PHRA)

Contacts are assessed from contact with a confirmed case of Covid-19 during their infectious period - 48 hours before the onset of symptoms if symptomatic, or 24 hours before the test for COVID-19 was taken in those who are asymptomatic.

Additionally, the below outlines points which will be considered when identifying contacts that meet this definition - as part of the PHRA with the case / educational setting. Of note: the determination of close contacts will be following the PHRA and the determination of the Medical Officer of Health.

### **Outbreaks**

For the purposes of defining an outbreak and reporting on the Computerised Infectious Diseases Register (CIDR) - In an educational facility, this is two or more confirmed cases of Covid-19 among students or staff where intra-school transmission is deemed the most likely source of infection following epidemiological investigation for the cases identified. Cases identified within educational facilities that have sources of infection which are most likely outside of the school setting following the epidemiological investigation, will therefore not be reported as outbreaks through CIDR.

At the start of the school year, the generic HSE guidance for contact tracing and close contacts was used but after having the experience of using this in a schools environment, the above guidance was agreed. This is version 1.0 of this guidance and was agreed on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020. The above definitions are adapted from the UK, ECDC and WHO guidance in light of the Irish experience. Please note HSE HPSC guidance is under constant review. Also, the HPSC national contact tracing guidance is currently being updated in light of emerging ECDC guidance. However, the above definitions for educational facilities is not expected to change in the next iteration of HPSC guidance for contact tracing.

Apologies for the delay in answering your PQ. I trust the above answers your query.

You may also be interested to know the HPSC publish a weekly report on COVID-19 in all facilities – primary, post primary, special education and childcare on [COVID-19 Schools mass testing reports - HSE.ie](#)

Yours sincerely,



Joan Gallagher  
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