

Taking control of the COVID-19 pandemic

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It is vital that we all take personal responsibility when implementing precautions to limit the spread of this coronavirus. This involves following the most recent advice of the HSE, with particular emphasis on social distancing, limiting our social interactions and good hand washing (see www.hse.ie).

For farm families, farm staff and persons entering the farm, the additional challenge is to maintain health and safety while continuing with farming operations.

It is important to note that if farm family members have any medical concerns or are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, they should phone their local GP.

Maintain perspective

Many of us can feel overwhelmed by concerns about coronavirus and the number of new cases diagnosed each day. However, it is important that we maintain a balanced perspective on the situation and take control of our own actions.

Professor Paul Fearon, Medical Director, St Patrick's Mental Health Service, has outlined five strategies we can use to reduce the anxiety associated with the coronavirus:

- Follow only reliable information – be sure of the facts.
- Don't forget the basics: the importance of regular, thorough hand washing and good respiratory hygiene – covering our mouths and noses and bent elbows or tissues when we cough or sneeze – in slowing

the spread of viruses.

- Deflect your anxiety: consider talking to family, friends or work colleagues about your shared worries and concerns.
- Use your experience and knowledge: you may already have a range of strategies to cope with anxiety. For example, going for a walk may assist with thinking out matters.
- Stop and do a reality check: If you are constantly worried about contracting the coronavirus think it through logically. Then, looking at all the evidence calmly, ask yourself if there are any realistic reasons to suppose you are at an increased risk at the moment.

Children and young people

With schools closed and children at home, it is vital that farming families lead by example and keep their children safe. Farms are workplaces and, of course, homes too. Children are naturally eager to spend time with adults in the absence of school pals.

When online classes and daily homework are completed for the day, it's natural for children on farms to want to get outside and help with the many jobs that need doing.

Young children should never be allowed unsupervised access to the farmyard and under no circumstances should they be allowed anywhere near working machinery.

Other dangerous areas such as slurry pits, silage pits, grain stores and chemical stores should be off limits at all times. The solution lies in providing safe play for your children and discussing safety positively in simple terms with children on a daily basis.

Children under 14 should never be allowed to drive a tractor or any self-propelled machine on the farm. Only children aged 14 and over should be allowed to operate a tractor under



adult supervision and in line with the limitations outlined in the HSA Code of Practice for Childhood Safety (Available at: www.hsa.ie).

Older people

Older people (aged 70+) are required to cocoon from other members of the community, particularly from younger people who could be carriers of the COVID-19.

Due to age and the increased likelihood of underlying medical conditions, older people are more likely to develop severe illness due to this virus.

Cocooning involves separation from family and friends, loss of freedom, uncertainty over health status and boredom.

Making sure self-care is a priority is crucial for the period of this emergency.

A positive attitude to self-care involves developing a good daily sleep routine as well as minimising alcohol and other treats. These habits contribute to maintaining a healthy immune system.

Regular exercise is vital for everyone and may be done in one's home, outdoors, close to the farmhouse. Accompanying an older person exercising (with appropriate distancing) or helping keep up-to-date with a family



Teagasc telephone helplines for farmers

A Teagasc telephone helpline, which was set up to assist farmers with queries relating to COVID-19, was announced by Professor Tom Kelly, Teagasc Director of Knowledge Transfer in March: "Teagasc have put in place a dedicated helpline for farmers to get advice on the range of issues they may face as they continue to do their essential work in maintaining the food supply chain.

This helpline is open to all farmers for a range of farming issues they face on a day-to-day basis."

The information line phone number is +353 76 1113533 and will be open from 9.30am to 12.30pm and from 2pm to 5pm Monday to Friday.

As usual, the Teagasc website (www.teagasc.ie) is a prime source of information on the full range of issues facing farm businesses. Teagasc clients should continue to use advisors

mobiles and office numbers.

Labour database

Teagasc has also set up a regional farm labour database to link farm families, where a farmer or a farm worker becomes ill with COVID-19, with an available relief worker. This done in collaboration with the Farm Relief Services (FRS) and the support of the IFA and ICMSA.

Thomas Curran, manager of the Teagasc Cork west advisory region said: "If you are available to work on farms to assist fellow farmers, please ring the designated Teagasc regional number in the table below, or your local Teagasc office. You will be registered on the Teagasc regional labour database. With your permission, your details will be passed to FRS and they will contact you in the event of a farmer needing assistance."

Teagasc Region	Office	Contact Number
Cork West	Skibbereen	028-21888
Cork East	Middleton	021-4631898
Kerry Limerick	Killarney	087-3826808
Tipperary	Thurles	0504-21777
Kilkenny Waterford	Dungarvan	058-41211
Carlow Wicklow Wexford	Johnstown Castle	053-9171350
Dublin Meath Louth Laois Kildare	Naas	045-879203
Offaly Westmeath Cavan Monaghan	Tullamore	057-9321405
Roscommon Longford	Roscommon	090-6626166
Clare Galway	Athenry	091-845804
Mayo	Ballina	087-6951432
Donegal Sligo Leitrim	Ballymote	071-9183369

member is especially helpful.

Boredom and isolation predictably cause distress for human beings who are programmed to be socially connected. Older people need a working mobile phone to communicate with family and friends, along with essential services such as a local medical practice or pharmacy.

Step-up the management of any chronic health condition, to minimise challenges to both mental and bodily health from poorly-managed illness. Now is the time to check that medications and supplements are being taken correctly. Gaining support from family members can help with health management and your primary care doctor can be consulted by phone, if needed.

Check-in with elderly neighbours living alone. For older people, ALONE has a dedicated coronavirus support line (0818) 222 024.

Farming issues

Give health and safety the utmost attention at this time of emergency. A farm injury is unwelcome at any time, but currently, an injury would be particularly unwelcome. It could jeopardise the running of the farm, require attendance at a medical facility and place more pressure on our limited health care resources.

This is a busy time of the year for farmers, with a lot of machinery work associated with fertiliser, slurry spreading and silage harvesting, along with work taking place with spraying crops.

Given the nature of this work, there will always be a need for people to visit the farm.

On many farms, this involves contractors spreading slurry or vets tending to sick animals.

It is important to be conscious of the necessary precautions to avoid the spread of coronavirus and ensure these precautions are implemented.

It is important that we, as farmers, have a conversation with these individuals before the job starts, in order to properly plan and organise with coronavirus precautions in mind.

Teagasc advisors are available at the end of the phone for advice and support during this challenging time. Office consultations and farm visits are also taking place by appointment at clients request for urgent issues.

The 'Community Call'

The "Community Call" is a major initiative that links local and national government with the community and voluntary sectors. It is a mobilisation of both state and voluntary resources to combat the effects of COVID-19.

The purpose of the call is to coordinate community activity, direct community assistance where it is needed and marshal the volunteering energy of the country. Contact your county council to access the service.

Follow public health directions

This pandemic will pass, but it needs the continued commitment of all people to defeat COVID-19. The virus needs to gain entry to the human body to survive. This takes place primarily through the respiratory system. For instance, soap and water used correctly in hand washing kills the virus by destroying its fatty outer layer. Keep up-to-date and follow all public health guidelines related to coronavirus.