

Dear Students,

08/04/2020

As you are aware physical access to the Student Health Centre is not possible at the moment so if you have any concerns regarding your health or would like to speak to the Institute Nurse, you are most welcome to contact me on 087 9977437 during office hours Monday - Friday. You may also email me via [ltully@ait.ie](mailto:ltully@ait.ie).

The outbreak of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) is unprecedented, we all have understandable fears and anxieties relating to the evolving situation that we find ourselves in. The advice to self-isolate and distance ourselves from others is the exact opposite of what we want to do in times of crisis. In order to keep you, your friends and others healthy, it is crucial that we continue to implement the measures issued by the Irish Government in response to Covid-19.

Many students have contacted me over the past few weeks with these frequently asked questions. I thought it might be helpful if I shared my responses with you all as we adapt to a restricted lifestyle and help stop the spread of the virus.

### **How is Coronavirus Spread?**

Coronavirus is spread in sneeze or cough droplets. To infect you, it has to get from an infected person's nose or mouth into your eyes, nose or mouth. This can be directly or indirectly such as on hands, objects or surfaces. Good hygiene and handwashing in line with physical distancing measures will offer you the best protection against Coronavirus.

### **How can I keep myself safe and well?**

**1.** You should stay at home: You must stay there in all circumstances, except in the following situations:

- To buy food (try to limit this to once per week/fortnight, shop wisely, plan meals)
- To attend medical appointments or collect medications (always phone ahead)
- To take brief individual physical exercise (within 2km radius)
- To travel to and from work where the work is considered an essential service
- To go out for vital family reasons including caring for children, elderly or vulnerable persons

If you do go out for any of these reasons, you should carry identification so that when Gardaí stop you, you can identify yourself and the essential reason for your trip.

**2.** Do **NOT** visit people. Spend time together virtually on your devices instead. Do **NOT** invite or allow unnecessary visitors to your home.

**3.** Continue to practice good hygiene. Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze. Avoid touching your face. Remember to clean and disinfect surfaces regularly. Pay particular attention to frequently touched objects like door handles, pens, your keyboard, keys, games consoles, remote controls, phone and devices. Keep your accommodation well-ventilated with windows open daily.

**4.** Do **NOT** share personal items with others particularly items that touch your face or mouth such as headphones/ headsets, spectacles, mobile phones, drinking bottles or cups. If you share a bathroom, ensure it is cleaned regularly and do not share towels with anyone else.

**5.** It is important that you move around as much as possible. Try to move your body every hour you are awake. If you are well, you may take individual physical activity outdoors daily within a 2km radius of your student accommodation. Keep a distance of at least 2 metres from others at all times.

6. Eat well and drink plenty of water to keep you hydrated. Aim to have 5-7 portions of fruit and vegetables per day and remember that tinned foods and frozen fruit and vegetables can be just as healthy as fresh varieties.

7. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Do **NOT** smoke/vape

### **Can COVID-19 be spread to other people by someone who has no symptoms?**

Current information suggests that COVID-19 spreads easily from person to person. While people are most likely to pass on the infection when they have symptoms, current information suggests that people may be able to spread the virus to others even if they themselves do not have any symptoms. One of the best ways to prevent person to person spread of infectious disease, including COVID19, is to use proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

### **How long will the COVID-19 pandemic last?**

Unfortunately, it is not possible to predict how long the pandemic will last. We are dealing with a new virus and therefore a lot of uncertainty remains. Try not to think ahead to the future, focus instead on taking each day as it comes.

### **What if I become unwell?**

If you develop a fever, new cough, shortness of breath, breathing difficulties or other respiratory symptoms, it is important that you self-isolate immediately in your own room and seek medical advice from your own Doctor or out of hour emergency service. If you meet specific clinical criteria the Doctor will arrange a test for you. The most important thing will be to treat the symptoms and monitor your condition. Your Doctor will advise you on how to do this. If you are waiting on a test, spend some time writing a retrospective 14 day list of close contacts and their phone numbers which will be of help to the people contact tracing in the event you have Coronavirus. At this point, your close contacts list should be very short and only contain those in your household.

**If you become very unwell and feel it is an emergency, call the emergency services 112/999**

### **What can I do to be more prepared?**

During this time, accidents can happen and people will develop other ailments and illness. If you become unwell in any way, please do not be afraid of seeking help when you need it. It is a good idea to have a list of your medications and any allergies ready as well as making sure you know your PPS number if you have one and **Eircode**. Have a little first aid kit ready with paracetamol and a thermometer if you have one. It is no harm to have a hospital bag assembled in the event you might need it. Ensure your phone is fully charged and has credit.

### **Where can I get reliable health information?**

1. Download our **Free 'Student Health Matters App'** which provides clear and reliable health information for students in Ireland. Choose Athlone Institute of Technology as your college for information on college supports. This app will help you look after your health and safety when worried about a health problem or if you are too embarrassed to ask for help or don't know what to do next. It works offline and offers quick and easy access to useful information.

2. Visit [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

Wishing you all a very pleasant Easter, I hope you stay well and can find positives in each day. Remember, that every day is a day closer to the other side of this strange and challenging time.

Yours in Health,

Laura Tully

Institute Nurse & Health Centre Coordinator