



Nursing and Midwifery Student Information Document -Covid-19

From the Office of the Chief Nursing Officer



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1. Purpose of this document

COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges to us all, as a society and has placed exceptional pressures on our healthcare system. As students, you will be at different stages of your education. Some students will be new to the healthcare system, which is both exciting and challenging, and other students had been undertaking clinical placements prior to COVID-19. Therefore, already have some experience and understanding of the impact of the pandemic.

Your feedback has been received and the questions raised have been listened to, this document aims to provide you with information and hopefully answer some of your concerns at this time. The document provides information for you and also points to where you can get additional and specific information on your degree programme, clinical placements, and the range of additional supports that have been put in place and those available should you need help. This booklet will be updated and published as required.

COVID-19 is a fast-changing and evolving situation, and this document may be subject to further development. We recognise students' different experiences and competencies, depending on where you are in your education programme.

This support document is set out to give information on:

- Actions taken so far during the pandemic.
- Students in 1st to 4th year supernumerary placements
- Student Interns on placement
- Frequently asked questions

1.1. Actions taken so far during COVID 19

MARCH AND APRIL 2020

In March 2020, our healthcare system had to reconfigure quickly to respond to the first surge of COVID-19. This resulted in many changes across the healthcare system and required the redeployment of many staff.

From April to July 2020 to support the national effort, clinical placements were suspended nationally for all students across our health service. At the same time, a Clinical Placement Oversight Group was established as a forum for higher education institutes (HEIs), clinical sites (HSE), the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) and the Department of Health to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and manage the suspension of placements.

In April 2020, the HSE had identified the need to increase the number of support staff across the system, in particular testing and tracing requirements continued to increase in demand, and redeployment of many staff was sustained to support this. An initiative was put in place where all supernumerary undergraduate nursing and midwifery students were offered a voluntary temporary Health Care Assistant (HCA) contract for a 3-month duration to assist with the national effort. These contracts were extended until August 2020. During this time, the HSE significantly increased the number of additional HCAs recruited to support the workforce. Approximately 1,200 students took up these contracts, which is about 30% of the overall student cohort.

Simultaneously in April 2020, the 4th year interns who are considered part of the workforce allocation remained in their placement sites. They were supported by staff in the clinical areas but as all placements had been suspended placement supports (CPCs, SALOs) were not available. As part of the initiative mentioned above, there was a temporary adjustment to the internship contract to reflect 1WTE HCA for a limited duration and interns were remunerated accordingly. This adjustment also ensured equity of pay across all undergraduate students working during this time.

The Clinical Placement Oversight Group identified that the national suspension of placements at the late stage in the academic year may result in a number of students not meeting the clinical placement requirements of the NMBI Standards and Requirements to progress to the next year. Where possible to address this, each HEI, through their own processes and procedures whilst cognisant of the impact of COVID 19 and the NMBI guidance, sought to ensure that students were not academically disadvantaged.

The situation remained under review throughout the summer 2020. Community transmission of COVID-19 remained low at this time. Re-introduction of non COVID care had commenced across the health system and staff had been deployed back to their substantive posts as HSE recruitment allowed.

Clinical placements for all nursing and midwifery students recommenced as normal in September 2020. Clinical placements for all students were maintained during Surge 2 of COVID-19. The Clinical Placement Oversight Group continued to monitor the situation throughout.

Attending clinical placements during COVID-19 and complying with public health measures may have put additional costs on students. There is a range of supports available for students, identified in full in **section 2.4 & 3.2** of this document.

JANUARY 2021

The most recent surge of COVID 19, surge 3 presented another different but significant challenge across the health services throughout January. The numbers of patients in hospital, in particular, in critical care continued to increase, peaking towards the end of January. The demand for acute respiratory care grew in both critical care and many ward areas resulting in redeployment of many qualified nursing staff to assist. Following a request from the HSE on 16 January to release the senior qualified staff, employed as part of your support infrastructure for clinical placements to assist, supernumerary placements were suspended for at least two weeks. This was needed to support clinical challenges. There was no change to 4th years to enable them to progress to internship.

This suspension, although necessary in the circumstances, was regrettable. It has been a very challenging period for everyone in health care, and this includes the impact on you as a student. It has been disruptive as well as challenging both physically and mentally.

As you know, the Clinical Placement Coordinators (CPCs), Student Allocation Liaison Officers (SALO's) and Practice Development Coordinators are essential in supporting you to achieve your clinical education. However, they are very senior and experienced staff and are required to support the clinical demand at this time. The situation across our healthcare system is evolving and clinical placements will resume as soon as the support structures are back in place. When placements resume may differ, depending on the type of placement you are undertaking.

The impact on all nursing and midwifery students from the delay in resuming placements will not be the same across the country. This will depend on the type of placement setting and programme being undertaken. The Higher Education Institutions, along with the NMBI and CNO office will work to minimise any impact on you and your programme.

This will be coordinated locally with you, using a number of options to support you to achieve your required clinical placement hours.

Your continued education, in the supportive environment and requirements to facilitate this are paramount, and any decision to resume placements will be dependent on the appropriate infrastructure being in place to support your learning. The Clinical Placement Oversight Group, the Higher Education Institutions and clinical partners are working together, with feedback from the student representatives, monitoring all clinical placement sites as the situation evolves.

The plan to return you to placement is complex; however, the Clinical Placement Oversight Group will continue their work and provide the CNO with regular comprehensive feedback to support decision making. We are hopeful that the early signs of a downward trend in hospital admissions, positive cases and levels of absenteeism related to COVID-19 will be sustained. It has therefore been decided to resume placements by Monday 8 February on a phased basis. This will, of course, be service dependant and the status of your individual placement will be communicated to you through your Higher Education Institution as early as possible.

2. Students on 1st to 4th year supernumerary placements

2.1. Overview

Given the significant pressures across the healthcare system, the decision to suspend placements was not made lightly. This section should address some of your education and placement questions. To date, 4th year supernumerary placements have continued, with the appropriate support structures in place. It is critical that they progress into their intern placement. Therefore, the information below regarding placement suspension mostly relates 1st to 3rd years.

2.2. Clinical Placements

Clinical placements are a significant part of your learning and of the 144-week undergraduate programme for the 4-year programme and 170-weeks for the integrated general and children's programme. Supernumerary placements amount to 45 weeks (56 weeks on C&G programme) of clinical learning and this is required to meet the NMBI education standards and requirements.

In the supernumerary capacity, as nursing and midwifery students, learning time is protected, and you are **not** counted within the staffing numbers of the health care provider to which you are attached. As students, rather than employees, your clinical placement has the primary focus on learning. This learning is done through actively participating in care under the supervision and support of qualified staff. This supervision is facilitated on a scale from direct to distant supervision, depending on your stage of

education, the skills you have developed, and the care being provided. You will know that clinical placements are across a variety of care areas so supervision may also vary, depending on your needs as you learn.

The objective is that by learning through supernumerary experience and intern participation, students can focus on the development of the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to become competent to practise as a registered nurse or midwife. Clinical placement ensures this learning takes place on the frontline where you as students will get to experience the variety of patients and environments in which care is provided in a supervised and protected way.

Completing your placement is a requirement for you to progress through your programme; however, we understand some of you may have concerns, and our advice is as follows:

You should **NOT** go on placement under any of the following circumstances:

- If you have an underlying health condition that would put you at higher risk of serious illness should you contract COVID-19,
- If you have been identified as a close contact of an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19,
- If you are in self-isolation or restricting your movements,
- If you have symptoms that suggest you have COVID-19,
- If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or another communicable disease.

Instead, you should contact your Link Lecturer or Allocations Officer for advice.

While on clinical placement:

- Students are provided with clear learning outcomes relevant to their year of training.
- When allocated to placements, all supernumerary students are distinct and exempt from the baseline staffing complement required for the delivery of services. Students are assigned a preceptor (direct supervisor) for the clinical placement duration and allocated a named nurse or midwife for every shift if their preceptor is not on duty.
- Placement areas have an identified CPC accessible to them. The CPC's role is to support students and staff within the clinical placement area to ensure the students' learning objectives are achieved, and the learning environment meets the required standards.

During your clinical placement time, you should:

- Have regular breaks to reduce the onset of fatigue and associated risks. Additional arrangements may need to be considered by organisations where staff work longer shifts and/or additional hours.
- Know where to access local support, e.g., Occupational Health contacts, student allocation liaison officers, and NMPDU for information and support.
- Have an effective safety induction into new areas where you are allocated to as clinical placement, ensuring you are familiar with emergency procedures, reporting procedures, local policies, and any equipment you may use.
- Be supported to raise concerns and seek reassurance, explore, and agree on solutions with the line manager, CPC, or HEI link lecturer.

2.2.1. EXPECTATIONS DURING PLACEMENTS

We appreciate that this is an ever-evolving situation and may require you to be flexible and patient. There may be a need to move your placement to an alternative area or site in order to maintain an optimal learning environment while meeting your clinical learning outcomes. The discussion will occur between you, your course team and relevant clinical site staff concerning any new working environment /practices during the COVID-19 period.

Students may be given the option to work different hours to those of the standard clinical placement week and may be asked to be flexible regarding this to complete placement requirements. Structure of days/weeks will vary from site-to-site. Hours of placement can be adjusted to meet your learning objectives; **this will be done in consultation and agreement** between you, your CPC, and the appropriate CN/MM and HEI.

While on placement, it is essential that you follow the HSE's PPE, social distancing and infection prevention and control guidelines which are available at <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/> and local guidance from your HEI.

Students are not qualified registered practitioners and cannot be responsible for a patient caseload. Supernumerary Students **cannot** replace registered nurses or midwives.

2.3. Degree Programme Progression following suspension of clinical placement

In discussion with your Higher Education Institutions, the HSE and NMBI, we will work together to minimise the impact of the suspension of clinical placement on your learning experience.

Every effort is being made to account for your clinical learning through alternative learning opportunities, where possible, e.g., virtual education, different placement sites or placements with RAN/MP or clinical specialists.

2.4. Supports Available

The staff of your school/department of nursing and midwifery should be your first port of call if you need support. Such supports can include your programme coordinator, practice module leaders, link lecturers, allocations office staff. Each University and Institute of Technology have dedicated health and wellbeing supports which continue to be available to students virtually.

2.4.1. PLACEMENT SUPPORTS

There are many supports available on clinical placement to protect supernumerary status:

- Students receive appropriate infection, prevention, and control training in advance of being allocated to their first clinical placement and receive refresher training at regular intervals.
- Students are assigned a preceptor and associate preceptor for the duration of the placement. Their preceptor is a registered nurse or midwife who is responsible for ensuring the student meets their learning needs in a supported manner. Students are allocated to a named nurse or midwife for every shift during their placement if their preceptor is not available.
- Additional learning resources, opportunities and supports are available to students throughout the placements to maintain a holistic approach to their learning.
- Students have access to personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout their clinical placements.

2.5. Financial Supports

Financial supports for non-intern nursing and midwifery students are governed by Circular 9/2004, that provides:

- An accommodation allowance up to €50.79 per week to be paid where a student must obtain accommodation away from their usual place of residence.
- A refund of travel expenses.

Both are paid as refunds on the production of receipts. This allowance is coordinated through your organisation's/ hospital's SALO.

2.5.1. ADDITIONAL COVID-19 SUPPORTS

Additional protections and supports have been made available for nursing and midwifery students due to COVID-19:

- Access to [Pandemic Unemployment Payment](#) (PUP) payment for those students who may have lost part-time employment due to COVID-19.
- Enhanced Illness benefit for those students who work part-time but have fallen ill with COVID-19.
- Other welfare schemes to assist with financial hardship due to illness, subject to qualifying criteria ([Supplementary Welfare Allowance](#), [Urgent Needs Payment](#)).
- Access for eligible students to the *National Access Plan* (Contingency Fund) and the [Student Assistance Fund](#).
- Information on these is available through student services in your HEI.

2.6. Working while on your education programme

Students may undertake paid work, whilst adhering to HSE/HPSC/OH advice including in healthcare settings, while maintaining their nursing or midwifery programme, if they wish to do so. In line with current guidelines, however, paid work will not be counted towards regulated clinical placement and experience.

HSE website with guidance <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/workplace-health-and-wellbeing-unit/covid-19-guidance/covid-19-testing-protocol-for-healthcare-workers-moving-to-a-different-service.pdf>

2.7. Access to COVID-19 Vaccination

Roll out of the vaccination for healthcare workers began on the 4th of January 2021 at hospital sites around the country which will continue in line with vaccine deliveries nationally. Vaccines will be given as the supply arrives in Ireland. Nursing and midwifery students, in line with the rolling priority schedule of implementation will have access to the vaccine, if available, while they are on placement, and they may need to return for the second dose.

2.8. What action do students need to take?

You do not need to take any direct action at this stage. Your Higher Education Institution will be considering the local position in association with placement providers. They will contact you if there is a need to adapt your placement or education plan. They will explain how your academic studies will be delivered during this time and be available to answer any questions or concerns through existing supports.

3. Students on Intern Placement

3.1. Clinical Placements

In contrast to the 45/56 weeks of supernumerary practice placement, the 36-week internship is a rostered placement for which students are paid a salary. During the entire duration of this internship, students remain under supervision either directly or indirectly; and are considered as 0.5 WTE of the workforce. This is to facilitate a patient caseload in-line with the student's skills, experience and knowledge whilst maximising supported learning for the student and ensuring patient safety. Rostered intern students can be allocated across all shift patterns including nights, weekends and 12-hour days, and are reimbursed accordingly.

Intern placements have not been suspended during the January 2021 COVID-19 response. Appropriate access to CPCs has been maintained in placement sites to support the intern placements meeting their educational outcomes.

Completion of regulated clinical placement is required for you to progress through your programme; however, we understand some of you may have concerns, and our advice is as follows:

You should **NOT** go on placement under any of the following circumstances:

- If you have an underlying health condition that would put you at higher risk of serious illness should you contract COVID-19.
- If you have been identified as a close-contact of an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19.
- If you are in self-isolation or restricting your movements.
- If you have symptoms that suggest you have COVID-19.
- If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or another communicable disease.

While on clinical placement:

- You are recognised as 0.5WTE of a staff nurse, and are protected by the HSE Corporate Safety Statement.
- Students are provided with clear learning outcomes relevant to their year of education.
- When allocated to placements, Students are assigned a preceptor/associate preceptor (direct supervisor) for the placement duration and allocated a named nurse or midwife for every shift if their preceptor is not on duty.
- Each placement area has a dedicated clinical placement coordinator (CPC) assigned to it. The CPC's role is to support students and staff within the clinical placement area to ensure the students' learning outcomes are achieved, and the learning environment meets the required standards.

During your clinical placement time, you should:

- Have regular breaks to reduce the onset of fatigue and associated risks. Additional arrangements may need to be considered by organisations where staff work longer shifts and/or additional hours.
- Know where to access local support, e.g., Occupational Health contacts, student allocation liaison officers, and NMPDU for information and support.
- Have an effective safety induction into new areas where you are allocated to on placement, ensuring you are familiar with emergency procedures, reporting procedures and any equipment you may use.
- Be supported to raise concerns and seek reassurance, explore and agree on solutions with the line manager, CPC or HEI link person.

3.2. Supports Available

There are many supports available on clinical placement:

- Students receive appropriate infection, prevention, and control training in advance of being allocated to their first clinical placement and receive refresher training at regular intervals.
- Students are assigned a preceptor for the duration of the placement. Their preceptor is a registered nurse or midwife who is responsible for ensuring the student meets their learning needs in a supported manner. Students are allocated to a named nurse or midwife for every shift during their placement if their preceptor is not available.
- Additional learning resources, opportunities and supports are available to students throughout the placements to maintain a holistic approach to their learning.
- Students have equal access to personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout their clinical placements.

Additional protections and supports have been made available for nursing and midwifery students due to COVID-19:

- Enhanced Illness benefit for those students who work part-time but have fallen ill with COVID-19.
- Other welfare schemes to assist with financial hardship due to illness, subject to qualifying criteria ([Supplementary Welfare Allowance](#), [Urgent Needs Payment](#)).
- Access for eligible students to the *National Access Plan* (Contingency Fund) and the [Student Assistance Fund](#).

➤ CAN I REFUSE TO SEE A PATIENT IF THERE IS NO PPE AVAILABLE?

Yes – you are under no obligation to see patients without PPE (if it is required). Please follow [HSE guidance for staff](#) if you have any concerns.

➤ WHAT IF A PATIENT I TREATED SUBSEQUENTLY TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19?

This is site-dependent, so you need to check when this happens - at the moment it depends on whether you had casual or close contact, i.e., how many contacts you had and what type of PPE you were wearing at the time. As with all other healthcare employees, [occupational Health will risk assess your exposure](#) and guide you should

you need testing. Should you develop any symptoms of COVID-19, follow the advice available on <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

➤ **WHY WERE INTERNS PAID AS HCAS IN 2020 AND NOT IN 2021?**

In April 2020, the HSE had identified the need to increase the number of support staff across the system, in particular testing and tracing requirements continued to increase in demand and redeployment of many staff was sustained to support this. As placements had been suspended from 10 April 2020, all undergraduate nursing and midwifery students were offered a voluntary temporary Health Care Assistant (HCA) contract for a 3-month duration to assist the national effort. This targeted recruitment of undergraduates to temporary HCA posts was very different than the regular recruitment of students to work as HCAs through nursing/midwifery banks. All interns remained in their placement sites as they were considered part of the workforce. Given all placements were cancelled nationally, there was a temporary adjustment to the internship contract to reflect 1WTE HCA for a limited duration and interns were remunerated accordingly. This ensured all undergraduate students were paid the same rate for the duration.

During this time where students could voluntarily work as temporary HCAs, the HSE significantly increased the number of additional HCAs recruited to support the workforce recognising that students would need to return to their graduate training from September 2020

The current situation has a different but significant demand and therefore has required a different response. As supernumerary clinical placements have not been suspended for an extended period (under weekly review) and the HCA initiative has not been required by the HSE in surge 3, the same contract adjustments are not required to be made.

However, a review of placement allowances and the intern salary is due to commence in Feb 2021. This review is expected to be completed by June 2021.

The Minister requested Professor Tom Collins to undertake a short review of the current allowances in light of COVID-19. The report was submitted to the Minister on the 31st of December and he has accepted all the recommendations. This report recommends a number of additional supports to you during your placements. It is due for publication shortly.

3.3. Access to COVID-19 Vaccination

Roll out of the vaccination for healthcare workers began on 4 January 2021 at hospital sites around the country which will continue dependent on vaccine deliveries nationally. Vaccines will be given as the supply arrives in Ireland. Nursing and midwifery students, in line with the rolling priority schedule of implementation will have access to the vaccine

if available while they are on placement, and they may need to return for the second dose.

4. Frequently Asked Questions

4.1. Clinical Placements

Clinical Placement represents the practice experience of a student's undergraduate programme where he/she will develop the practical knowledge, clinical skills and professional values required to meet the standards to qualify and be eligible to join the professional register.

➤ Why are supernumerary placements so important?

Nursing and midwifery students' practice experiences must be gained under the supervision of a registered nurse/midwife. The nurses and midwives providing the supervision are called preceptors and have completed additional training to meet their students' clinical placement education needs. Supernumerary status means that the student is not included in the clinical area's workforce numbers and is not assigned a clinical caseload. This ensures protected learning, essential to support students in gaining the range of skills and experience needed for qualification.

➤ Can nursing or midwifery students be used to replace registered nurses?

No. Students are not qualified registered practitioners and **cannot** be responsible for a patient caseload. Students cannot replace registered nurses or midwives. CPCs are in available to oversee that these protections that are in place.

➤ Why can't I be paid on my supernumerary placement?

Some members of the public, public representatives, and many of you have asked the question why nursing and midwifery students do not get paid while on supernumerary placement. This is an important question and one which has been given careful consideration as our profession has evolved and developed particularly in the last twenty years.

Prior to 1995, nursing and midwifery were apprenticeship models of training. This meant that students were employees, worked all shift patterns, were responsible for a patient caseload and received an apprenticeship salary. However, they did not have a funded CPC support infrastructure in place, they worked a full year as opposed to an academic year and did not qualify with a bachelor's degree in Nursing or Midwifery. International evidence has demonstrated that, where the nursing and midwifery workforce is prepared

to bachelor's degree level (or higher), there is a decreased risk of mortality and better patient outcomes.

A graduate programme such as yours, allows students to be additional to the workforce, and therefore does not place the same challenges on you to be responsible for a defined caseload while actively learning, as was the case during the apprenticeship model. The graduate nursing and midwifery education programmes have been subject to review over the past 10 years, and this has demonstrated that our education model works.

Paying students on placement, as is the case for intern students' means the student is an employee and must take on the additional caseload responsibilities that come with this. It means that each student replaces a proportion of the qualified nursing or midwifery workforce instead of being additional to it. This approach would be a regressive step for our professions and would not be in line with international and World Health Organisation recommendations.

➤ **Why don't nursing and midwifery students get paid when they undertake some of the same duties as the HCAs?**

Even though there are many similarities in the duties undertaken, nursing and midwifery students have the protections of learning outcomes, named preceptors and CPCs to ensure your learning needs are being met. Nursing and midwifery students' progress as competencies are achieved and it is being additional to the workforce that enables this to happen. Of course, there are times when placement sites have exceptionally busy periods and where providing the supports are challenging, but its these very times where your CPCs and practice development units advocate for your learning needs. They ensure it does not impact in a way that affects your education progression.

➤ **What is the difference between supernumerary and internship placement?**

Nursing and midwifery students get a chance to consolidate their education and training when they do their final placement called their internship. The internship is a continual 36-week rostered clinical placement, including annual leave. Depending on the programme, students get opportunities to learn in practice in various healthcare settings. The intern placement is a paid placement as the nursing and midwifery student take a reduced caseload.

During the Internship placement students remain under supervision and are considered as 0.5 WTE of the workforce. Throughout the internship placement, the students must have a preceptor monitor their clinical progress and supervise the student with their patient caseload. Intern students can be allocated across all shift patterns, including nights, weekends and 12-hour days. Supernumerary students undertaking their clinical placements are assigned to day duty only Monday to Friday unless a specific

arrangement is requested and agreed with the student to fulfil a particular learning objective.

➤ **Where can clinical placements take place?**

All clinical placements must meet the Standards and Requirements of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland and the Higher Education Institutions. There must be agreed levels of nursing or midwifery staff and student support resources to support students' education and development needs during their clinical placement. The NMBI undertakes inspections of placement sites.

New NMBI guidance on placements have been revised during COVID-19 to include e-health or telemedicine areas to enhance and broaden student learning opportunities. and this will continue.

➤ **How many supernumerary clinical placements does a student need to do in total, and when do they happen?**

To meet the education standards requirements, the entire undergraduate Programme's total length is 144 Weeks except for the Integrated Children's and General programme which is 170-weeks; 45 weeks (56 weeks on C&G programme) of this are under supernumerary placement status. These placements are spread out across years 1, 2 and 3 and between September and December in Year 4. Further information can be located on the NMBI website.

The remaining 36 placement weeks, are in the final year when students are paid as employees, known and Intern Nurses/midwives. Intern students are not supernumerary as they are counted as part of the nursing or midwifery workforce. During this period, they can reduce patient caseload, but supervision and preceptorship remain in place.

➤ **What does it mean if some of my clinical placement week have been suspended?**

The decision to suspend placements is never taken lightly as we recognise the impact it can have on your progress through your programme. Working with the NMBI and your HEI, the first two weeks (18th – 31st January 2021) of your suspended placement have been credited to your programme. This was possible to do whilst still achieving the education requirements set out in the governing EU Directives. However, for some students, depending on the stage of your education and which placements are still required to be completed, individualised learning plans may be developed with your HEI and clinical partners, where possible, to minimise the effect of suspensions on your learning and progress.

➤ **What happens if the student raises concern at the local level on a clinical placement about their wellbeing or the clinical area?**

Students are encouraged to report any issues to the preceptor they are assigned who will support them by reporting to the nurse or midwife manager if required. Recognising that students can be worried about reporting an issue during their placement, the student is allocated a CPC who is independent of the clinical area. Students always have access to a named CPC during their supernumerary placement. The nurse/midwife manager and the CPC's role are to ensure that issues are managed appropriately or escalated to the next level of nurse/midwife management if necessary.

The student also has access to a named tutor from the HEI they attend throughout their clinical placements who can also act as a facilitator to engage with clinical staff on the students' behalf if a concern is raised.

➤ **What oversight is in place to monitor clinical placements and the students' safety nationally?**

An oversight group has been meeting regularly since the COVID-19 outbreak to monitor the situation nationally. This group comprises of representatives from the Dept of Health, the HSE, the NMBI and the HEIs. Issues can be raised through various channels, and the appropriate response or escalation process is decided. Many concerns raised have been managed and resolved locally with support from this oversight group.

➤ **What supports are in place routinely (Pre Covid-19) for students on clinical placement to protect their supernumerary status?**

- Students have clear learning outcomes relevant to their year of education, which they must meet during their clinical placement. The objectives ensure that students and preceptors are aware of the learning needs to be achieved in each placement; it also prevents students from participating in areas of care beyond their scope of practice or knowledge capability.
- Students receive appropriate infection, prevention, and control training in advance of being allocated to their first clinical placement and receive refresher training after regular intervals.
- All supernumerary students when allocated to placements are in addition to the usual staffing levels.
- Students are assigned a preceptor for the duration of the placement. Their preceptor is a registered nurse or midwife who is responsible for ensuring the student meets their learning needs in a supported manner. Students are allocated to a named nurse or midwife for every shift during their placement if their preceptor is not available.

- Placement areas have a dedicated clinical placement coordinator (CPC) accessible to it. The CPC's role is to support students and staff within the clinical placement area to ensure the students' learning objectives are achieved, and the learning environment meets the required.
- Additional learning resources, opportunities and supports are available to students throughout the placements so that they can maintain a holistic approach to their learning.
- Students have equal access to personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout their clinical placements.

➤ **Can I refuse to see a patient if there is no PPE available?**

Yes – you are under no obligation to see patients without PPE (if it is required) and please ask your named nurse, midwife, or any member of qualified staff if you are unsure in any situation. Please inform your CPC, CN/MM or Link Lecturer if you have any concerns about PPE.

➤ **Will I be required to physical distance while I am on placement?**

Yes – at all times, students are expected to adhere to HSE guidelines regarding physical distancing. However, if you are treating a patient, as per HSE/HPSC guidelines you must wear appropriate PPE if you cannot maintain physical distancing.

➤ **What if a patient I treated subsequently tests positive for COVID-19?**

This is site-dependent, so you need to check when this happens - at the moment it depends on whether you had casual or close contact, i.e., how many contacts you had and what type of PPE you were wearing at the time. Should you develop any symptoms of COVID-19, follow the advice available on <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

➤ **What if I develop signs of COVID-19 during placement?**

Ultimately it will be your (the student) responsibility to communicate any COVID-19 symptoms or test results to the Programme Lead and the Clinical area as soon as is possible. Please follow local sick leave reporting guidance regarding such communication. Please note test results will be relayed to you via the HSE contact tracing units, not your GP or Occupational Health Departments

The HSE contact tracing unit **does not inform** the university or clinical placement site.

Further information can be found:

- <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>
 - <https://www2.hse.ie/Apps/Services/GpOutOfHours.aspx?county=Louth>
 - <https://www.hpsc.ie/notifiablediseases/listofnotifiablediseases/>
- Where do I go if I need more information?

If you still have question or concerns the first point of contact should be your school/ department, though your lecturer or personal tutor. Specific questions regarding your placements can be directed to your placement sites Student Allocation Liaison Officer or CPC.

More information can be found through:

- <https://www.hse.ie/safetyandwellbeing>
- <https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/corporate-safety-statement-2020.pdf>
- <https://www.nmbi.ie/Help-Centre>
- <https://www.inmo.ie/Covid19>
- <https://www.siptu.ie/media/covid-19-information/>

<https://www.pna.ie/index.php/member-information/covid-19>

