

Screen Producers Ireland
COVID-19
Good Practice
Considerations
for Production



**Screen
Producers**
Ireland

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SPI COVID-19 Good Practice Considerations

As we move from COVID restrictions and guidelines into a transitional period where COVID-19 is still in the community but is not presenting the same risk of hospitalisation and death that it did in previous months, the requirements for sector guidelines has now moved into the advice stage. This is to reflect the change in government guidelines and advice and the revised status of the Work Safely Protocols as Transitional Protocol: Good Guidance Practice for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19.

Continued risk to our industry – what is it?

There is obviously a continued risk to anyone who is in contact with vulnerable persons or is themselves a vulnerable/high risk person. Employers still have duty of care to protect such high risk/extremely high-risk persons. [Read more here →](#)

The main continued risk to our industry lies in the risk of persons being identified as COVID positive and being required to isolate for 7 days. This risk is heightened for the small number of those who are ill enough to be bed ridden for 3-5 days and not able to work for another 3-5 days. That some of these will be essential to current filming and consequently their illness will result in either the pausing of filming or rescheduling obviously brings a level of financial risk to productions.

How you decide to proceed with testing and masking in particular, will depend on the level of protection you feel is necessary for your production and in particular for your cast. Various factors need to be risk assessed to allow you to decide what is best for your production:

- **Regulatory Requirements**

The Government has published the Transitional Protocol Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 – see section below. Under H&S law you still have a duty of care to your workers in relation to COVID which means that you need to include in your H&S risk assessment the measures you are taking to protect your workers in this regard.

- **Competency**

H&S regulations require that a competent person performs workplace risk assessments. It may be advisable to employ the service of a Health & Safety professional to assist with your risk assessment.

Key factors to consider in assessing the risk to your production:

- **Locations/sets:** small, enclosed sets are obviously riskier than outdoors, are you filming in areas with members of the public?
- **COVID history of your cast:** if they are prepared to share it – are they vaccinated? Are they boosted? Have they had COVID in the last 2 months? Are they particularly vulnerable or high risk? (It is not legal to use vaccination status to affect employment status – i.e. it is not legal to require someone to be vaccinated or boosted)
- **Your script & action:** does it involve much close contact work, intimate scenes, exertion, singing, dancing etc? Do you require many extras and how close to your main cast do they need to be?

Testing

Whether or not to continue testing, what type of testing to perform and the frequency of testing will be a matter for individual productions to decide, based on your risk assessment.

The purpose of testing in our industry is to try to identify positive persons before they become infectious. Antigen testing does not reliably identify positive cases in the earlier stages of infections whereas PCR tests carried out regularly should identify someone as they enter into infection and before they are infectious.

- Looking at your locations and your script and the level of close contact between crew and cast, do you need to test all the shooting company, or do you take a Zone specific approach such as testing Zone A only? (Zone A – those who are in the same environment or in very close contact with as unmasked cast ie. on set, a truck or applying makeup etc). Obviously, there is mixing between Zone A and Zone B in departments and infections could be passed on that way but if you are PCR testing, you should be able to pick them up if an infection enters Zone A.
- Could you test Zone A twice a week and Zone B once a week? Maybe three times a week for specified cast in very close contact on particular days. Could you use antigen testing in conjunction with PCR testing, maybe on Mondays after the weekend. If someone is contagious, antigen test should pick it up, although they are not fool proof.
- If you decide not to test all the shooting crew, can you make arrangements so that Zones do not mix when eating particularly as this is obviously a high-risk activity?
- Look at dailies, particularly those in close contact with your cast – stunts, hair & makeup, wardrobe. ADs. These people may well be mixing across a number of productions or different work environment and not in a regular testing programme.
- If you are using extras particularly in close proximity to your cast, antigen testing them immediately before their call should identify anyone who is contagious but if they are to be close to your cast and particularly if they are on set for a couple of more days, it may be safer to PCR test them.
- With a high number of people, with Omicron particularly, being asymptomatic, there are people who do not know that they have Omicron or are just coming out of infection. These people may test positive on a PCR test. Your testing company should be able to assess the CT value of the PCR test, particularly if you retest after 24 hours, and let you know if they are in the tail end of infection or just showing remnants of a recent infection or are in fact just becoming infected with COVID.
- The HSE state you do not need to test people who have had COVID in the last 180 days, however it is possible to catch Omicron after having had Delta and there is a question over whether you can catch Omicron for a second time. So if you don't test people who have had COVID previously then there is a high level of risk that they may catch it again. Again, if you test them your test provider should be able to tell you if they are coming into a new infection or just starting.
- Are you working with older cast or crew members? Has anyone let you know that they are particularly vulnerable or live with someone who is? Employers have a duty of care to protect high risk or very high-risk workers.

[Read more here →](#)

Masks

Type of mask - It is generally accepted that FFP2/FFP3/N95 masks are necessary to give the level of protection that is necessary in our industry. Surgical masks should only be worn for limited periods after makeup is completed, if at all.

FFP masks should be fitted. Professionally if possible, but this is not often available. Different masks fit different sizes and shapes of face better. Masks should move in and out slightly when people are breathing, if they fit correctly. Ensure they seal around the face and particularly around the nose.

- **Close contact:** Anyone in close contact with unmasked cast should wear a mask at all times.
- **Outdoors:** Consider how close crew need to be each other when considering whether masks need to be worn outside. If directors, DOPs, stunt co-ordinators etc need to be within a metre of cast, even outdoors, masks should be worn.
- **Indoors:** In order to protect your cast against Omicron which is particularly contagious it is advisable that crew wear masks in all confined spaces – this would include most indoor sets.

Ventilation

The importance of good ventilation cannot be over emphasised. If mechanical, the system should not recirculate air but bring in fresh air. Ventilation systems can be measured in number of air changes an hour and 4-5 is a good target. Ventilation should be turned on early – a couple of hours before set is being used, if possible, particularly if it is going to be turned off during shooting because of sound issues.

- Can you open windows and doors between takes/scenes?
- It would be still be advisable not to have cast sharing rooms.
- Air purifiers – air purifiers and in particular those with HEPA filters can help to purify the air, particularly on small, enclosed sets. They should be kept running as long as possible, definitely between scenes and during resets. HEPA filters should be level 13 at least and ensure you follow the manufacturer's instructions re frequency of change of the filters. Remember, though that no air purifier is going to stop someone passing on infection if they are speaking together in very close proximity.
- CO2 monitoring is a useful visual indicator of when you need to open doors and windows.

Cleaning

Whilst it has been agreed that the risk of passing COVID to others via surfaces and objects is not nearly as high as was thought at the start of the pandemic, it is still important to clean objects and surfaces that are high touch areas, and to encourage the use of hand sanitisers by continuing to have sanitiser available in all areas and reminding people to use it through the day. A solution maybe to use a fogger to spray sets before use each day and having a daily cleaner for a couple of hours to clean & sanitise trailers, eating areas and toilets.

Catering/Dining

Eating in close quarters is a high-risk activity. Where possible allow enough room to sit people diagonally from each other so that people are not eating directly facing each other, particularly anyone in close contact with cast.

Transport

When considering crew and cast transport, reducing the number of people in each vehicle and/or wearing FFP2/N95 masks helps reduce the chance of spreading infection.

Potential case of COVID

It is essential that workers do not come into work if they are exhibiting symptoms of COVID – it is important that they should stay at home and ring their COVID-19 supervisor or HOD. It is required that there is a system in place for dealing with someone with potential symptoms of COVID. This person should be isolated from the company as soon as possible & tested. If they are tested by antigen test, the test should alert you if the person is contagious. A PCR test will indicate if the person is in the early stages of illness and hopefully before they become contagious.

Positive cases & close contacts

At the moment the regulations still state that anyone who tests positive is required to isolate and a close contact who is not boosted is to restrict their movements for 7 days. It is likely that over the coming months these regulations will be lifted.

Factors for productions to consider:

- **Positive cases:** the risk is to the cast in particular. If someone tests positive in Zone A or is required to be around cast when unmasked, it would be sensible to consider the risk of them passing COVID onto your cast. If you decide to keep positive cases off work an antigen test is a good system of checking if they are still infectious. A PCR test would also allow you to assess CT levels.
- **Close contacts:** although Government regulations distinguish between boosted and unboosted it is still possible to catch and pass on COVID if you have been boosted. There is therefore a risk to your cast from someone who is a close contact. PCR testing will identify if a close contact is becoming infected and infectious, antigen testing should identify if they are infectious.

COVID Protocols

As we move away from government regulation of COVID measures, it is very important that all cast & crew understand before they join the company what the particular protocols and requirements are on that shoot. In particular the procedure around positive cases and close contacts should be explained.

Please note that the Enhanced Illness Benefit for COVID has now ended. You may be eligible for Sickness Benefit [See here](#) →

Statutory Requirements

The Government has published the **Transitional Protocol Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19**.

This includes:

- Updating your COVID-19 Response Plan to take account of the changed public health advice and the advice in the guidance document.
- Review and update your occupational health and safety (OSH) risk assessments and safety statement to take account of changed public health advice in far as it refers to our sector with particular reference to high risk and very high-risk workers, ventilation, hand & respiratory hygiene, workers with potential symptoms of COVID-19.
- Maintain measures to deal with a suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace & maintain any specific measures or response for dealing with an outbreak of COVID-19.
- Consider the place of the following measures in your workplace: appropriate use of suitable face masks, physical distancing, hand and respiratory hygiene, ventilation, signage etc.

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