

Covid-19 Policy

Introduction

The LIFE-FORCE Organisation reopened the Centre on **Tuesday 26th May 2020**, however in order to maintain a safe working environment the government health and safety practises must be observed and implemented by all Staff, Counsellors, Therapists, Tutors, Students on Placement, School Students hereafter referred to as Members and also clients and visitors.

These guidelines were revised by the government and from **8th August 2020** it was a mandatory legal requirement for members of the public to wear a face mask/shield, unless they had a valid exemption, while visiting business premises which provide a professional service.

By law it was not compulsory for Members to wear a face mask however the Organisation was required to implement their usage as considered appropriate.

On the **19th July 2021 Freedom Day** was announced by the government and their guidelines were revised; social distancing ended and the wearing of face masks was no longer compulsory.

However, the government guidelines were further revised and from **30th November 2021** face coverings had to be worn on public transport and in shops.

Further additions were also made in accordance with the changes implemented by the government on **14th December 2021** the **11th January 2022** and the **27th January 2022**.

On the **24th February 2022** the Government ended all legal Covid-19 restrictions including self-isolation requirements and replaced these with 'Learning to Live Safely With Covid-19 Guidelines', and this policy was amended according to these recommendations.

On **1st April 2022** these 'Learning to Live Safely With Covid-19 Guidelines' were further updated and free LFTs were discontinued. However, the Government **recommendations** to help reduce the risk of catching Covid-19 and passing it on to others are still relevant and therefore form the basis of this further amended policy. As such everyone has an individual responsibility to implement these recommendations at all times.

Work Requirements for the Centre

1. Members, clients and visitors should not enter the Centre if they have any Covid-19 type symptoms, e.g. **flu like symptoms, a temperature, cough or sneezing, loss of taste** etc., that are in addition to any normal symptoms that they have on a regular basis.
2. Members, clients or visitor, who develop **symptoms and/or test positive** for Covid-19 Delta/Omicron variants are not legally required to self-isolate. However it is recommended they stay at home for 5 days and avoid contact with other people, unless they test negative using a Lateral Flow Test.
3. Members, clients and visitors are not required to be double vaccinated or to of had a booster to visit the Centre, however following government guidelines regarding this it is a personal choice.
4. Members, clients or visitors who live with or have come into **close contact** with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19 either the Delta or Omicron variant do not need to self-isolate, whether or not they are fully vaccinated. However, it is recommended they avoid coming into contact with anyone at the Centre who they know is at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell from Covid-19 or other respiratory infections. Also, if they do visit the Centre it is recommended they wear a face covering and let anyone they are meeting know that they are a close contact.
5. Members who are registered to provide remote counselling could offer a session of online/phone therapy to clients with Covid-19 or clients who are a contact of someone with Covid-19 if circumstances require.
6. All members, clients and visitors can choose whether or not to wear a **face mask or covering while in the public areas of the building**, including the Rainbow Room and kitchen, and when interacting with others. All counsellors must instruct their clients accordingly before they come to the Centre and if they wish to wear a face covering then ask them to bring one with them.

7. All counsellors, students and therapists can choose whether or not to wear a **face mask or covering** during sessions, however they must carry out a personal risk assessment according to their individual medical circumstances regarding what precautions they may need to put in place to keep themselves safe.
8. Clients are not required to wear a face mask during counselling sessions, but not to do so is at their own risk. As such all counsellors, students on placement and therapists are responsible for managing the risk with each individual client regarding keeping the client and themselves safe while in the therapy room. Other factors to take into consideration are the working environment, the health issues of the client and counsellor and of the people in each of their individual households. An informed choice can then be made together that establishes what procedures need to be put in place to keep both parties safe eg., the client/counsellor to wear/not wear a face mask during the sessions. The agreed procedures should be noted in the client's case notes and implemented at every session.
9. Upon entering the Centre, Members, clients and visitors should either wash their hands thoroughly for a minimum of 20 seconds or use the hand gel in the entrance.
10. Members, clients and visitors should cover their nose and mouth with disposable tissues when coughing and sneezing, then put used tissues in a bin and immediately wash their hands or use a hand sanitiser. If they do not have a tissue they should cough into the crook of their elbow and not their hand.
11. Social distancing is no longer a government requirement therefore it is each Member's personal responsibility to decide what distance to maintain between themselves and other people. This also applies when using the stairs and kitchen areas.
12. When new clients come to the Centre for the first session then their counsellor should meet them in the foyer just before the appointment time. Thereafter the counsellor **must ask all their clients to arrive on time so that they can go straight to the therapy room** and should therefore advise them in advance which room they will be using and its location in the building before the session. Alternatively, if this is not possible for some reason then counsellors must meet their clients in the foyer and escort them to the therapy room.
13. Waiting on the premises is discouraged, however if clients arrive a few minutes early due to their travel arrangements they can wait in the Rainbow room if available or in the Basement Kitchen. Due to confidentiality clients should not wait on the stairs or on the 1st floor landing. Also, the parent/carer who are accompanying a child client should whenever possible be asked not to wait on the premises and to only return at the end of the client's appointment time. If this is not possible then the parent/carer **can wait in the Kitchen basement**.
14. All crockery and cutlery must be washed thoroughly then dried and put straight away.
15. Members must ensure they vacate the therapy rooms on time, which is 5 minutes before the booked end time, and return the key to the key box for the next therapist to use.
16. It is important to respect and keep the communal space as empty as possible and therefore Members, clients and visitors must not chat or remain in the foyer or social spaces within the building for any longer than necessary.
17. **The Office currently remains CLOSED to all Members, clients and visitors other than strictly by appointment only. Any visitors entering the Office must keep the interaction brief and leave as soon as possible. Members should continue to contact the Office only by email or by text to the office mobile. Please do not ring the main office number or leave a message on the answer phone as this is checked less frequently than emails and text messages.**

Covid-19 Risk Assessment for Courses & Groups

Work Requirements for Courses & Groups

The following requirements are in ADDITION to those detailed above under Work Requirements for the Centre and apply specifically to courses and groups.

1. All tutors and group facilitators **are responsible for carrying out a risk assessment** of the group working environment and put their own Covid-19 safety provisions in place.
2. Members may wear a face mask or/and a face shield in the training room (Rainbow Room) for their own personal health considerations if they wish to do so. The decision to wear a face covering is each person's personal choice and responsibility and can be discussed with the course leader at the time as necessary.
3. Members may bring their own small bottle of hand gel sanitiser and tissues for personal use.
4. Members should bring their own hot drinks in a flask or/and bottled drinks.
5. Members are advised to bring their own snacks/food for breaks and lunch or alternatively they can go out to eat.
6. In small groups when considering whether or not to wear a face mask or shield, Members should take into account their own health circumstances and those of whom they live with.