

9<sup>th</sup> November 2021

The Department has developed guidance for drug and alcohol support groups and treatment programmes. The guidance recognises the important role of drug and alcohol support groups and treatment programmes in helping individuals to build recovery capital and to avoid relapse into harmful patterns of substance use.

In line with the reopening of society, the cap on attendance at drug and alcohol support groups and programmes has been lifted, subject to protective measures being in place. These include

- wearing of face masks (can be removed for consumption of refreshments)
- ensuring indoor spaces are well ventilated
- maintaining adequate social distancing (two metres where possible)
- covering coughs and sneezes and washing our hands
- not attending meetings if a person has symptoms and getting tested

The specific number attending groups or programmes should be determined by the capacity of the venue to ensure social distancing and should be reduced accordingly in smaller venues.

The difficulties in implementing the [EU Digital COVID Certificate](#) (COVID-19 pass) for attendance at support groups and programmes are recognised. Organisers should encourage participants to avail of the Covid-19 vaccination. Vaccination protects individuals from the impact of the disease and is especially important where other participants may have underlying health issues.

Public health advice is that non-vaccinated people should avoid congregated indoor settings. Other meeting formats - outdoors and online - should continue to be provided.

My officials will continue to engage with AA and other recovery support groups to ensure the safety of those attending groups and programmes, in line with public health advice.

Jim Walsh  
Dept of Health