

Subject: updated guidance for drug and alcohol support groups & treatment programmes

Date: Wednesday 25 August 2021 at 18:19:16 Irish Standard Time

From: Jim Walsh

To: leinstertrustee



Hi Emmet

The majority of indoor activities are still restricted given the current high level of Covid-19 infection. However, the Dept of Health has supported the continued operation of drug and alcohol support groups and treatment programmes given their importance for the health and wellbeing of participants. We are happy to continue to provide bespoke guidance for this sector.

I wish to advise you that the maximum number of participants in drug and alcohol support groups and treatment programmes can be increased from 15 to 20, to include organisers. This higher limit is subject to 2 metre social distancing in the venue.

A further increase in the maximum number of participants will be considered on foot of the Government roadmap to further re-open social and economic activities, which will be published shortly.

The following guidance should be taken into account in increasing the number of participants in support groups and programmes:

- All participants should be encouraged to available of the Covid-19 vaccination. Vaccination will not alone protect them from the impact of the disease, but will protect other participants in support groups and programme. Vaccination is an important contribution to social solidarity.
- The Delta variant of Covid-19 is highly infectious and poses a major risk to the population, in particular those who are not vaccinated. Public health advice remains that the non-vaccinated should avoid congregated indoor settings. Other meeting formats - outdoors and online - should continue to be provided.
- People living with drug and alcohol addictions may experience poor physical health and weakened immune systems, making them especially vulnerable to Covid-19. Participants who are vaccinated may continue to face these heightened risks due to weakened immune systems.
- Masks remain an important protective measure for everyone, including those that are fully vaccinated. Good ventilation of indoor venues is also imperative.

Thank you for your positive engagement with the Dept on this matter and your patience as we sought clarification on what was possible given the continuing public health restrictions.

Jim Walsh
Drugs policy and social inclusion unit
Dept of Health