

## **CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): UPDATE**

### **24 November 2021**

On 23 November 2021, the Executive announced further steps that need to be taken to break the chain of transmission of Covid-19 in the community. In light of this it is considered important to restate the position for courts, as understandably queries may arise. The overriding objective is to ensure that the administration of justice continues to be delivered within a safe environment.

Courts remain open for face to face hearings however physical attendance at a court building should only be when required by the judge. Judges will make a decision as to whether physical attendance is required based on the individual circumstances of the case. Judges may also timetable or schedule hearings in order to manage footfall in courtrooms and public areas. While social distancing measures continue to be a requirement, there will be a role/requirement for hybrid and remote hearings in order to manage footfall in courtrooms and public areas.

Everyone attending a court or a NICTS building must follow the guidance on social distancing (2 metres between seated positions or 1 metre where mitigations such as glass partitions are in place). Attendees must wear face coverings in designated spaces and should follow the PHA guidance on hand hygiene. Covid mitigations, such as screens and partitions will remain in place. NICTS has published [guidance](#) for court and tribunal users.

Legal representatives should continue to collaboratively complete and lodge the [relevant forms](#) within the prescribed timeframes in advance of a substantive hearing or where required by the Judge or Master so that appropriate arrangements can be made by court staff to manage the numbers present in courtrooms and court buildings. Only those persons who are required by the court to attend may be admitted to the courtroom. In addition, only participants in hearings should attend the court building, with supporters and family members encouraged not to attend.

The court office will inform the parties of the date, time and type of hearing and the details of any callover which may be arranged in advance of the hearing. Practitioners are reminded to check ICOS and/or Public Court Lists Online to confirm the Sightlink details and should take note of the [Practice Direction and guidance on Remote Hearings](#). If a matter is unable to proceed on its allocated date, or has been settled, the relevant court office must be advised as soon as possible.

It is important for parties and legal representatives to schedule consultations to take place before arriving at the court. Where consultations are required during a hearing facilities may be made available on request. Strict limits on capacity will be applied to the consultation facilities, the majority of which will only safely accommodate two individuals. Rooms will be cleaned at regular intervals.

All arrangements will be kept under review. Further detailed guidance can be found [here](#).