

19 August 2020.

Information issued by the Chief Epidemiologist relating to social distance rules as regards COVID-19.

Individual measures regarding protection against infection are absolutely vital when it comes to preventing the spread of COVID-19. Individual measures include hand washing, using hand sanitisers, measures to prevent infections from coughing and sneezing, the use of personal protective equipment and social distancing (often referred to as the two-metre rule).

The two-metre rule has been established as it is considered one of the basic principles of preventing infection. Social closeness is considered to increase the risk of infection considerably. As regards the virus that causes COVID-19, it has been shown that a one metre distance between people decreases the risk of infection five-fold. For each metre in addition, the risk reduction doubles. For this reason, many countries have established rules and instructions on minimum social distancing.

Social distancing has also been referred to as distance limits and closeness rules. All these terms, however, are translations of the English phrase “social distancing”.

The notice issued by the Ministry of Health as regards limits on gatherings from 12 August 2020, No. 792/2020, general social distancing is defined in the following manner: Social distancing between individuals is the distance between persons that minimises the risk of infection. *“At gatherings, in all workplaces and in all other operations, including those listed in Article 3, care must be taken to ensure that there are at least **2 metres between individuals who are not closely linked**”.*

This means that the restriction contained in the notice obligates commercial operators to ensure that individuals who do not share a home can maintain a two-metre distance from others. Individuals, however, are not obligated to maintain a two-metre social distance.

The Chief Epidemiologist has, nevertheless, recommended that individuals comply with the two-metre social distancing rule when interacting with other unrelated or otherwise unconnected parties but has not considered it necessary to focus solely on interactions between parties not closely linked. One can, therefore, say that each person is responsible for maintaining his/her own two-metre social distance as well as being responsible for his/her own personal protection against infection.

Chief Epidemiologist