

# Farmers are highly vulnerable to COVID-19

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Preventing the horrific mortality and ill health consequences of COVID-19 infection poses a huge and on-going challenge in Ireland and among the farming community over the coming months. A study by a research and knowledge transfer team from Teagasc and the National Center for Men's Health, Institute of Technology, Carlow indicates that farming population is highly vulnerable to COVID-19 due mainly to

their older age profile and poor health status.

The study, titled "Essential and Vulnerable: Implications of COVID-19 in Ireland," has been published recently in the Journal of Agromedicine. This is the Journal of the National Farm Medicine Center, U.S., which is the leading journal in the field of Agromedicine.

Lead Author, Dr. David Meredith, Teagasc Rural Economy and Development Program, stated that whilst there are greater numbers of older people in the rural and farming population and, generally, are in poorer health which makes these communities vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. Continuing to adhere to the public health guidelines associated with hand washing, wearing masks and limiting close contacts are critical to keeping these communities safe.

Dr. Meredith added: "Many farmers have limited personal contacts outside the farm due to the nature of their work, they still face infection risks associated with vital activities such as trading via the sale of produce, or obtaining farm supplies. They should continue to take the necessary COVID-19 precautions. In light of the recent increase in COVID-19 cases within households across the country, these precautions should be followed by all members of the household when returning from school, shopping, work or social activities."

Doctoral scholar in farmers' health, Ms Diana van Doorn at Teagasc/IT Carlow stated that [medical conditions](#) associated with more severe symptoms of COVID-19 include lung disease of asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and the co-occurrence of these diseases with obesity and smoking. She stated that Irish farmers' health research found that 31% of farmers used medication to control risk factors for heart cardiovascular disease which they used as prescribed in 95% of cases, which is a positive finding. However, since the COVID-19 emergency there is a marked reduction generally in persons attending [medical](#)

[services](#), when these services remain fully open, which could lead to adverse health consequences in the future.

Dr. Noel Richardson, Director of the National Center for Men's Health, IT Carlow stated that farmers need to pay particular attention to maintaining health over the winter period. "Particular emphasis should be given to maintaining a proper diet and focusing on taking regular exercise to maintain health. The Irish farmers' health research shows that 86% of farmers are overweight or obese, which is both a [health](#) and COVID-19 risk factor." Dr. Richardson added that "exercise along with social contact for leisure purposes within COVID-19 guidelines plays a crucial also in managing stresses."

Health and Safety Specialist advisor with Teagasc, Dr. John McNamara stated that increased potential for transmission of the virus exists over the winter months due to the "cold and flu season," so implementing HSE guidelines will be crucial to prevent its spread. Additionally, wearing a suitable mask is recommended when working at less than 2 meters from other workers and in public areas.

**More information:** David Meredith et al. Essential and Vulnerable: Implications of Covid-19 for Farmers in Ireland, *Journal of Agromedicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/1059924X.2020.1814920](https://doi.org/10.1080/1059924X.2020.1814920)

Provided by Teagasc

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