

Minister Simon Harris,
Department of Health,
Miesian Plaza,
Baggot Street,
Dublin 2
3rd April 2020



Dear Minister Harris,

I hope you are safe and well in these difficult times. At the outset, I want to thank yourself and the staff of the Department of Health for the excellent work you are doing to steer Ireland through the Covid-19 crisis.

At this time, I hope that myself and other elected representatives can serve as a conduit for the concerns and queries of the public. One issue that members of the public have repeatedly raised with myself and Green Party colleagues in recent days has been the closure of allotments in a number of council areas.

Fingal County Council, for example, has ordered the closure of all allotments within its jurisdiction, and released the following statement:

"The decision to close allotments was on foot of last Friday's directive from Government in relation to new measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Following inquiries from allotment users in Fingal, clarification was sought and the Government/Public Health advice is that there is no exemption for allotments for a number of reasons. They do not fall under the food production exemption, there is no way to manage who has access to allotments and there is no way to enforce social distancing once people are on site. These measures have been introduced to protect our communities and particularly older people and those who are medically vulnerable, by slowing the spread of the virus."

I recognise that public health must be the paramount consideration, and I fully welcome the extensive actions the Government has taken to limit the spread of Covid-19, including the Taoiseach's announcement last Friday of much more restrictive measures.

However, in relation to the specific case of allotments, I would urge you to issue revised public health guidance that recognise allotments' role as an essential food production site for many individuals and communities and includes them within the food production exemption on this basis.

Allotments are in the open air, are effectively private (rather than public) spaces, and are laid out in a manner amenable to social distancing. A trip to the allotment presents a much lower risk of infection compared to, say, a trip to the supermarket, while providing a food source that may be just as essential to a given individual.

I would be grateful if yourself or a member of your Department would consider my input on this issue, and revert to me as soon as practicable.

Yours sincerely,