



The geography of COVID-19

Ireland's first case of Coronavirus was confirmed on 29 February 2020. Since then, the way we live has changed dramatically. The Irish Government has announced a medium-term plan to suppress the spread of Coronavirus while keeping as much of the country open as possible. At the core of the plan is an escalating five-level alert system. Primary teachers can help to explain the causes, impacts and long term

repercussions of this global pandemic using a geographical lens and methodologies advocated by primary geography. Our world is so interconnected that a virus emanating from China in December 2019 was in every county in Ireland three months later. Children are curious about the virus and they have important questions which need to be answered in an age-appropriate manner.

Mapping activities

Interactive maps charting the spread of the virus are available from many sources including the World Health Organisation. Ask children to chart the spread of the disease, making references to places they know and don't know. They can source the Wuhan South China Seafood Market (the alleged source of the disease) on Google Earth/Maps and explore the 'Street View' function (which is limited to isolated 365 degree photos) to investigate the nearby Hankou Railway Station – drawing inferences of how quickly it could have spread from here across China and elsewhere – making observations about contributory factors such as a crowded station.

The children could use a map of the world or an atlas to mark Wuhan, China. Use the name of a continent, country and compass directions to describe its location.

In terms of international travel, the government is advising against all non-essential travel overseas. But people may need to travel to and from Ireland for essential purposes.

Teachers could assign children the following tasks:

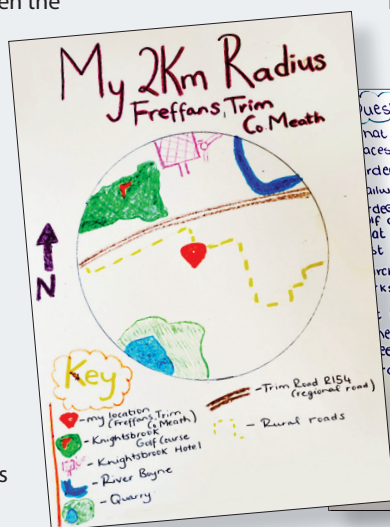
- The government has asked you to compile a map of all entry points to Ireland. Considering that we are an Island nation, select the ten most popular entry points and suggest how you might reduce travel through these points.
- Irish tourists were asked to holiday at home. Plan five staycations in your county, for when restrictions lift, documenting background information, travel directions and activities which can be



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- enjoyed by all of the family.
- During lockdown, the Irish government has restricted social movements in an effort to combat COVID-19. Any non-essential movement beyond your home is limited to a 5km radius for exercise. Using Google Maps and the website www.2kmfromhome.com, draw a circle (using a 1km, 2km, 5km or 10km radius), with your home in the centre.

- Draw a map to illustrate all of the things you can do within a 5km radius of your home.
- Draw a school map which illustrates the recommended one-way movement of teachers and children inside and outside the school building.
- Tracking the occurrences and spread of COVID-19 in Ireland can be monitored on a classroom map of Ireland. This can include high and low risk counties.



Causes of the spread of the Coronavirus to Ireland (diamond ranking)

With a map of the country, ask children to discuss some geographical reasons for the spread of the virus in Ireland. Distribute the following nine statements on cards. Ask the children to arrange the statements in a diamond shape: the most important cause at the top, two causes of equal but lesser importance in the second row, three causes of moderate importance in the third row, two causes of relatively little importance in the fourth row and the least important cause at the bottom. Ask groups to compare and explain their results.

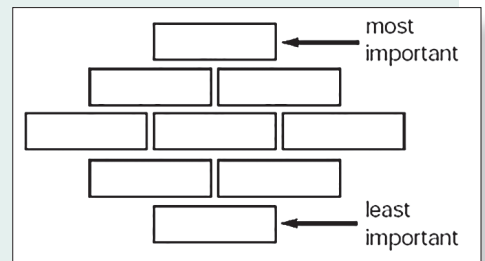
1. In March, thousands of people gathered together to celebrate the Cheltenham Horse Racing Festival, contributing to the spread of disease across the UK. Several Irish citizens attended the festival.
2. There have been reports of large numbers of people gathering for house parties.
3. There were reports of people

sneezing and coughing on Aer Lingus and Ryanair flights on route to all Irish airports.

4. When universities re-opened, thousands of students returned to Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and other urban areas.
5. Some global leaders were slow to recognise the dangers posed by the virus.
6. Several people have not downloaded the COVID-19 Tracker app.
7. Ireland is an island so it cannot be closed off from the rest of the world.
8. There has been a dramatic increase of COVID-19 cases in the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland.
9. Some people are not wearing masks or practicing social distancing.

There are no right or wrong answers with this exercise. The learning takes place as the children discuss reasons for the geographical spread of the virus.

In the class discussion, highlight the



following points:

1. We are living in a globalised society, therefore, our interdependence has become evident during the recent crisis.
2. As an island nation we are dependent on other countries for certain goods. Could we become more interdependent in terms of food production? Links to the school garden are useful here.
3. Technological development has enhanced media coverage about major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Is this a good or bad thing?

Impacts of the Coronavirus in Ireland

Using the compass framework illustrated below children can categorise the impacts of COVID-19 into the following categories:

- N – Natural/ecological questions
- E – Economic questions
- S – Social and cultural questions
- W – Who decides? Who benefits? (political questions)

Using this framework, ask the children to sort the following cards into four categories:

Who decides? These are questions about power, who makes choices and decides what is to happen, who benefits and loses as a result of these decisions and at what cost.

Social These are questions about people, their relationships, their traditions, culture and the way they live. They include questions about how, for example, gender, race, disability, class and age affect social relationships.



Natural These are questions about the environment – energy, air, water, soil, living things – and their relationships to each other. These questions are also about the built as well as the 'natural' environment.

Economic These are questions about money, trading, aid, ownership, buying and selling.

Natural/ Environmental	Economic	Social/Cultural	Who decides?
Amy notices greater numbers of birds in her back garden and she has designed her own 'hospital' bird feeder to care for the birds.	Sarah works in Mc Carthy's bar but she has no job since March when all pubs closed.	Emily received a season ticket for GAA matches this year but she cannot attend because of COVID-19.	The Irish Government decided to close all schools for an extended period of time.
Ben has planted herbs in his garden for the first time. He is looking forward to seeing them used for family meals.	Hugh wanted to order his favourite Galway jersey. The sportswear company is now making hospital scrubs for healthcare workers in Ireland. Hugh will have to use his old jersey.	Roisin Upton, a member of the Irish Hockey team, could not travel to Japan as the 2020 Olympics were postponed.	The World Health Organisation (WHO) was established to direct international health within the United Nations system. An Irish man Mike Ryan is leading the response of the WHO.
James has more time to spend in his local area. His teacher has asked him to document examples of flowers, trees and mini beasts in his SESE copy.	Some people who lost their jobs received a COVID-19 payment from the government.	Major festivals, including The Ploughing Championships and the Ballinasloe Horse Fair, were cancelled.	Irish scientists are advising the government about actions preventing the spread of the virus.

What can we learn for the future?

At all times, teachers should display sensitivity with regard to the personal, family and school experiences of COVID-19. Nonetheless, it is important for teachers and parents to remain hopeful. The dark clouds of the COVID-19 virus have brought many silver linings including time to think, time to notice nature and time to appreciate what is truly important. Geography is also

about future planning and this experience can help us to think about creating a more just, sustainable and human society. This is the ideal time for children to articulate their vision for a better locality, a fairer Ireland and a kinder world.

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