

## Foreword

Last month we published the Coronavirus (COVID-19) - *Framework for Decision Making* as part of our effort to inform, and listen to, the people of Scotland. This outlined our principles and approach to managing our way through and out of this crisis to a 'new normal'.

Since then we have continued to see signs of hope, not least in the declining numbers of people requiring intensive care treatment as a result of the virus. This is testament to the sacrifices we have all made in staying at home and to the courageous work of our health and care services.

Despite this progress, each day brings news of more people who have sadly lost their lives to this cruel disease and so our absolute commitment to suppressing the virus remains. We must proceed with caution, and while the time is right to think about what comes next, it is certainly not the time for complacency.

In the *Framework for Decision Making* we said that we wanted to keep the public up to speed with our thinking, to share as much as we could of that and to involve people in those decisions. This update continues that process.

It provides more background on the "R number" that people will have heard us talk about. This is the reproduction rate of the virus – it estimates how many people are currently catching the virus from each person who has it. It is vital that we keep this number below 1. If we do not, the virus will run out of control again and any relaxation of lockdown conditions will most likely have to be reversed.

By law, we must review our COVID-19 regulations every three weeks. This ensures that they remain proportionate to our need to tackle this public health emergency, and the absolute necessity of suppressing the virus, but also recognises the broader harms to health, the economy and society that are the side-effects of these measures. The final day in the current three-week cycle is this Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> May.

At present the weight of evidence across these harms indicates that there is very little room, if any, for changing the restrictions at this time. However, I want to assure you that the restrictions will be in place for no longer than required. We understand their consequences.

It is worth stressing that there are fine margins involved here. Once changes are made we will need to carefully monitor their impacts as even small shifts in the R number could lead to the virus spreading exponentially again.

I also want to assure you that we are using the time that the regulations are in place to do the planning required to ensure that our workplaces, our schools and other public spaces will be safe to return to when the time is right to change our restrictions. That includes planning for possible changes to how businesses, schools and public transport will have to operate, as well as expanding our testing capacity and our capability to undertake Test, Trace, Isolate and Support (TTIS) to ensure that the virus remains suppressed and we can go about our lives safely, as we set out in our [publication yesterday](#).

## 2. Review and Assessment

### Review of COVID-19 Regulations

A number of rules for physical distancing and restrictions on activity are currently in place to tackle the public health emergency. These include legal requirements set out in The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 as well as guidance or advice to the public issued by the Scottish Government.

Many of these match those across the rest of the UK. However, some are specific to Scotland. The table at **Annex A** lists the measures currently in place. Further detailed guidance is available online.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 regulations must be reviewed every three weeks. This ensures that they remain proportionate to the need to tackle this public health emergency, and the absolute necessity of suppressing the virus, but also recognises the broader harms to health, the economy and society that are the side-effects of these measures. The final day in the current three-week cycle is this Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> May. This coincides with the final review date for the UK Government and the dates for the other Devolved Administrations fall at or close to this time.

The following three-week cycle ends on 28<sup>th</sup> May. Consistent with the legislation, changes can be made before that date, and of course after that date, if the assessment indicates that is the right thing to do: the regulations should only be in place for as long as required.

The Scottish Government participates in the UK Four Nations process that facilitates collective decision making and shares expert advice. While alignment of decision-making will often make sense, on occasion, expert advice may point to the need for different approaches across the UK reflecting specific circumstances in each country or to different optimal timings for changing restrictions across the varied geography of the UK. On such occasions, the Scottish Government will consider the appropriate course of action to best meet Scotland's specific needs and circumstances.

In line with our commitment to transparency, based on the current evidence for Scotland, this update indicates that it is almost certain that no significant change will be possible on 7<sup>th</sup> May and the lockdown will be extended. This position will be confirmed when we formally review the position on 7<sup>th</sup> May.

### Assessment Process

The *Framework for Decision Making* set out our assessment framework. Our first objective and absolute necessity is to contain and suppress the virus. Beyond that, our challenge is to minimise broader harm to our health, society and economy and to restore as much normality to everyday life as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/>