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Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement – 24 August 2021

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Statement given by the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on Tuesday, 24 August 2021.

 **This document is part of a collection**

Good afternoon

The CMO and I will take questions shortly.

However, I'll give an overview first of where we are with Covid, starting with today's statistics.

4,323 positive cases were reported yesterday - that's 14.5% of all tests carried out.

364 people are in hospital – 8 more than yesterday.

And 43 people are in intensive care, which is a rise of 2 from yesterday.

Sadly, a further 10 deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours, which means that the total number of deaths registered, under our daily definition, is now 8,080.

As always, my condolences go to everyone who has lost someone as a result of the virus.

As of this morning, 4,085,552 people have received a first dose of the vaccine.

And 3,587,145 people have received a second dose.

Around 80% of over 18 year olds have now had both doses of the vaccine. That includes 95% of over 40s - which is a genuinely remarkable uptake.

82% of 30 to 39 year olds have had a first dose, and 68% have had both doses. For 18 to 29 years, 74% have had first doses and 41% have had second doses.

16 & 17 year olds started being offered vaccine a couple of weeks ago and 40% have now had their first jab.

So uptake figures are good. But there are still eligible people out there who are not yet vaccinated and that poses a risk - to you if you are one of them and to all of us, because it means our overall level of population immunity is not as high as it could be.

So if you are 16 or over and haven't yet done so, please get vaccinated now. You just need to turn up at a drop-in centre – you can find out where your nearest centre is by visiting the NHS Inform site, or by checking the social media pages of your local health board.

I have two further issues I want to cover today.

In a moment, I will discuss the overall course of the pandemic – including the rise in cases that we have seen during the last week.

But before that, I want to confirm an announcement made in the last half hour or so.

The Scottish Government has always been committed to the establishment of a statutory public inquiry into the handling of the pandemic.

I can confirm that, today, we have started the process of getting the inquiry up and running. It will be established by the end of this year as promised and will take a persons-centered, human rights based approach.

We have just published draft aims and principles for the inquiry which, following consultation between now and the end of September, with interested parties, including bereaved families, are intended to become the formal Terms of Reference.

A copy of the draft and details of how to contribute views can be found on the Scottish Government website.

The Lord Advocate has also begun discussions with the Lord President about appointing a judge to lead the inquiry. It is fully our intention that this will be a judge-led inquiry.

The inquiry will look at all matters related to the handling of the pandemic that were within our devolved competence. This will include, of course, the situation in care homes.

However, we will also liaise closely with the UK Government - and with other devolved governments – on the likely terms of a UK wide inquiry. Where possible it will be important to

avoid duplication and overlap to reduce the burden on those giving evidence.

However, the need for co-operation with other governments is not a reason to delay the establishment of our own inquiry.

I believe that a full public inquiry has a very important role to play, both in scrutinising the decisions we took - and indeed continue to take - in the course of the pandemic, and also in identifying and learning lessons for the future.

I therefore believe that it is appropriate to establish that inquiry as soon as possible. The process that we have begun today is an important step towards that.

The second point I want to address is the sharp rise in cases that we have seen in the last few days.

New cases in Scotland have more than doubled during the last week. This is one of the sharpest rises we have seen during the pandemic.

As a result, new cases are now slightly higher than the exceptional levels we saw in early July. In fact today's daily figure is the largest we have ever recorded. Though it is worth remembering that we do more testing now than in the early stages of the pandemic.

Now, we always knew that cases were likely to rise as restrictions eased - so to some extent what we are seeing now is not entirely unexpected.

However, the scale of the increase is still a cause of real concern - although context is still important.

We know that vaccination is making a big difference.

Indeed that explains why so many of the new cases we are seeing just now are in younger people less likely to have had both doses of vaccine. Around half of new cases are in people under the age of 25.

We shouldn't be complacent about that of course. Young people can fall seriously ill from Covid, including through long Covid.

And of course vaccination does not provide anyone – of any age - with 100% protection. In fact around 1/3 of new cases recently, have been in people who had been fully vaccinated.

However, vaccination does make us somewhat less likely to get Covid and significantly less likely to fall seriously ill from Covid.

That means vaccination is still significantly weakening the link between high numbers of new cases and serious harm to people's health.

That's why we are able to take a different - much less restrictive - approach to dealing with the virus now than was possible at earlier stages of the pandemic.

And it is worth remembering why this is important for us to do.

Children need to go to school, businesses need to trade more normally, jobs rely on businesses and all of us need to be able to live more freely and to interact with friends, family and wider networks.

Vaccination is helping us do all of that.

But – and this is the difficult part for all of us - even with vaccination, we cannot be totally relaxed about this surge either.

The link between new cases and serious health harms has been weakened, but it has not been completely broken. That means the rise in cases in the last week may well result in more people going to hospital in the coming days, perhaps requiring intensive care treatment and more people dying.

It also means that if the surge continues or accelerates - and if we start to see evidence of a substantial increase in serious illness as a result – we cannot completely rule out having to reimpose some restrictions.

Of course, we hope not to have to do that - and if we did, we would be as limited and proportionate as possible.

However - as has been the case throughout - what happens in the next few weeks will depend to some extent on all of us.

This is yet another fragile - and potentially very pivotal - moment in our journey through the pandemic.

It is a moment to remember that - even though most restrictions have been lifted - the virus is still circulating. And the Delta variant is very transmissible.

So we need to continue to take care and think about how, in our own behaviours, we can limit the ability of the virus to spread.

Indeed, in some ways, the basic precautions we can all take have become more important - not less - as life has returned so much more to normal.

So I am asking everyone today to do the following - for the sake of ourselves and each other.

First, if you are eligible and haven't yet done so, please get vaccinated. This remains the single most important thing we can all do to keep each other safe.

The reverse of that is equally true - not getting vaccinated is putting yourself and others at greater risk.

Second, please test yourself regularly – that way, if you have the virus but don't have symptoms, you have a chance of picking that up before going to work or out socialising and inadvertently

passing it to others.

Free lateral flow tests are available by post through the NHS inform website, or for collection from test sites and local pharmacies.

If you test positive through one of these lateral flow devices - or if you have symptoms of the virus - make sure that you self-isolate, and book a PCR test.

Third, stick to the rules still in place.

For example wear face coverings in shops and public transport - this is a reasonably simple and straightforward way in which we can protect each other in indoor settings.

And lastly, be mindful of the basic steps we can take to reduce risk. Indeed, make this a moment when we all remind ourselves to keep doing these things.

Wash your hands and surfaces as regularly as possible.

Even though it's not the law any more, keep a safe distance from people in other households if you can.

Continue to minimise physical contact where possible - like handshaking, for example.

Avoid crowded indoor places.

And meet outdoors as much as possible, especially for as long as we have reasonable weather. If you are indoors, open windows – the better ventilated a room is, the safer it is.

It is vital at this juncture that we remember to do all of these things. As we head into autumn and winter, these basic steps might also help us limit spread of flu and other viruses too.

In the coming days, we will also be liaising with businesses to encourage compliance with basic mitigations too. In particular, I am today reminding businesses to continue to support home working for now where possible.

We have come a long way and we shouldn't lose sight of that. In so many ways, things are better.

But like other countries in this global pandemic, we face a challenging period ahead again.

Let's come together again to get through it.

Let's keep ourselves and our loved ones safe.

And let's maintain the progress that we've all worked so hard for.

Thank you.

Was this helpful?

- Yes
- No
- Yes, but
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