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News

New guidance issued for the festive period

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Part of: [Health and social care](#), [Public safety and emergencies](#), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in Scotland](#)

Restrictions tightened due to spread of new variant of COVID-19.

Scotland will significantly tighten protections against Coronavirus (COVID-19) to prevent the spread of the new, highly contagious strain of the virus.

Following confirmation that the new variant of COVID-19 spreads substantially more quickly, the First Minister announced that Scotland needs to act now.

To keep people safe, the First Minister announced:

- the planned easing of restrictions around Christmas will be limited to Christmas Day itself, and not the previous 5 day window that was planned
- legal household limits will still apply - a maximum of 8 people from 3 households - however advice is to minimise the numbers. Where possible, people should celebrate the festive period at home in their own household and meet with others outdoors
- other than for specific exemptions, travel between Scotland and the rest of the UK will not be legal
- travel within Scotland will be allowed on Christmas Day
- from Boxing Day, all of Scotland will have Level 4 restrictions applied, including the closure of non-essential retail and hospitality. The only exceptions will be Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and the other island communities where restrictions have been reduced in recent weeks, who will be placed in Level 3
- from Boxing Day, in line with existing law, travel across local authority boundaries between areas in Level 3 or 4 will not be legal other than for specific exempt purposes

The First Minister also set out new plans for the return of schools in the New Year. Teachers will return to work as planned and children of key workers and the most vulnerable children, will

return to schools as planned.

For the majority of pupils the holiday period will be extended until 11 January and learning will begin online from then until at least 18 January.

All these measures will be kept under regular review.

The First Minister said:

"Last week it was confirmed that a new variant of the virus had been identified in the UK, and I advised Parliament that a small number of cases of it had already been identified in Scotland.

"While further analysis is required to establish this one way or another, we already have a concern that this strain may be driving what appears to be faster transmission in some hospitals and care homes.

"That's why we have decided to act and to act firmly.

"Firstly, we are asking everyone to redouble your personal efforts in sticking to the rules and following FACTS.

"Secondly, we intend to maintain a strict travel ban between Scotland and the rest of the UK. This will remain in place throughout the festive period. We simply cannot risk more of this strain entering the country if we can possibly avoid it.

"Thirdly, we now intend to change the law to allow mixing indoors in a bubble on Christmas Day only. The household limits will still apply - a maximum of 8 people from 3 households - is the law. But the advice will be to minimise numbers as far as possible.

"My message is stay home, stay safe and enjoy Christmas. That is in your own interest and the interest of everyone you love."

Speaking about beyond Christmas, the First Minister said:

"To limit, as far as we can, the risk of this strain spreading further than it has within Scotland, we intend to apply Level 4 measures to all of mainland Scotland for a period of three weeks from one minute after midnight on Boxing Day morning.

"The only exceptions will be Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and the other island communities where we have reduced restrictions in recent weeks, who will go into Level 3 but with strict restrictions on who can travel to and from those islands.

"The situation the new strain presents means that until we are sure it is firmly under control – until we are sure we are not facing the same situation as the south of England today faces, we must slightly change our plans for the way our schools work.

"Schools still open next week will close as planned – we are not changing that. They were then due to reopen from 5 January with all councils areas back by the 7.

“Instead of that, here is what we are now going to do - for the children of key workers – such as nurses in our hospitals – schools will open and stay open as normal. They will also open as normal for the most vulnerable children. All teachers will also return to work as scheduled and planned. For the majority of pupils, however, the holidays are being extended until 11 January. Starting on that date, learning will be online until at least 18 January.

“After that, assuming we are confident we have the virus under control we will aim to reopen schools more fully but at least until then, schools will go online only other than for the children of key workers and the most vulnerable.”

Background

[The First Minister's statement.](#)

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