



We must maintain our focus on fighting the virus – Health Minister

Date published: 20 November 2020

Health Minister Robin Swann has urged everyone across Northern Ireland to focus all their energies on fighting the Covid-19 threat.

The Minister said pushing down infection rates and saving lives has to remain our top priority.

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

**LATEST
NEWS**

“That is something we can all unite behind in the days and weeks ahead. I would urge everyone to please play your part in stopping the virus spreading.

“By each of our actions, we can give our health service and those working in it some breathing space for Christmas and allow some more of us to be together over the holiday period. It won’t be a normal Christmas but we can make it a better one if we strictly follow public health advice in the coming weeks.

“As we move towards the festive season, this year more than ever let us take time to reflect on one of its most important aspects – gifts to our loved ones. What better gift than protecting their health, and giving them the prospect of more time with each other in the future. That is how high the stakes are.

"Hope is on the horizon for next year with the progress on vaccines. Please play your part in preventing avoidable deaths and ensuring as many of us as possible get to enjoy better times in 2021."

Minister Swann reiterated that the virus represents the single biggest threat to the economy.

"I understand the frustrations being voiced from the business community today. I have made my own feelings clear both inside and outside the Executive. We could all spend many more days raking over the detail. But where would that get us – what would it achieve?"

"As Health Minister, I am very conscious of the need to support the business community - the importance of employment and a strong economy for all our health. I have to focus my energies on ensuring everything possible is being done to protect people from Covid-19 and to stop our hospitals being overwhelmed.

"I want to see us eventually getting back to the days of busy shops, bars and restaurants. But we have to be realistic. My priority right now has to be protecting health and social care, saving lives and supporting staff through this extremely difficult winter.

"We can all do our bit to drive down infection rates. Please stay at home. Work from home if you possibly can. Don't mix with other households. If you have to go out, keep your distance from other people. Wear a face covering. And keep washing your hands.

"I also want to make a direct appeal in relation to businesses that are now open but will close next week. I urge customers and businesses to take every precaution against spreading the virus, not least through social distancing. Don't put yourself, your loved ones, other customers or staff members at risk. I really want to emphasise that point."

The Health Minister spelt out the rationale for the Executive's decision to impose tighter restrictions.

“The restrictions that have been place in recent weeks have made a difference. There has been a reduction in cases per day of around 50% since they were introduced. But numbers of cases, admissions, hospital inpatients, ICU occupancy and deaths remain at a worrying level. Hospital inpatients are at a higher level than was reached in wave 1 and are declining only very slowly. As a consequence, the hospital system and staff remain under very serious pressure.

“Without further intervention, there was a very real risk of our hospitals being overwhelmed in the run up to Christmas. Care for Covid and non-Covid patients would have been in jeopardy. Lives would have been at stake. Further action simply had to be taken.”

Notes to editors:

1. For media enquiries please contact the DoH Press Office by email pressoffice@health-ni.gov.uk (<mailto:pressoffice@health-ni.gov.uk>).
2. Follow us on twitter [@healthdpt](https://twitter.com/healthdpt) (<http://twitter.com/healthdpt>).
3. The Executive Information Service operates an out of hours service for media enquiries between 1800hrs and 0800hrs Monday to Friday and at weekends and public holidays. The duty press officer can be contacted on 028 9037 8110.

Share this page

[\(/#facebook\)](#)

[\(/#twitter\)](#)

[\(/#linkedin\)](#)

Latest news

- [Health Minister prioritises pay talks](#) (</news/health-minister-prioritises-pay-talks>)
04 February 2024
- [Statistics from the Northern Ireland Substance Misuse Database: 2022/23](#)
(</news/statistics-northern-ireland-substance-misuse-database-202223>)
31 January 2024
- [Patient Education / Self Management Programmes for People with Long Term Conditions 2022/23](#) (</news/patient-education-self-management-programmes-people-long-term-conditions-202223>)
30 January 2024
- [Department of Health statement on UK plans to tackle tobacco and vaping](#)
(</news/department-health-statement-uk-plans-tackle-tobacco-and-vaping>)
29 January 2024

[More news ... \(/news\)](#)