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# Coronavirus: Edwin Poots says he did not link virus with religion

🕒 21 October 2020

## Coronavirus



LIAM MCBURNEY/ PA

| The agriculture minister has been facing calls from other Stormont parties to apologise

**DUP minister Edwin Poots has said he has not "at any time" attributed the spread of Covid-19 in Northern Ireland to religious affiliations.**

Last week, the minister said the difference in transmission between nationalist and unionist areas was "around six to one".

He had been facing calls from other Stormont parties to apologise.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Mr Poots said he cherished his "Catholic friends and neighbours".

The agriculture minister said that over the course of the last few days "Sinn Féin and others have tried to distort and twist comments I made in reference to the spread of Covid-19".

"At no time did I attribute the spread of Covid-19 to religion. It is deeply regrettable that such a narrative has been created," he added.

## Comments 'a disgrace'

"It is obvious such spread is related to behavioural issues nothing more, nothing less. I cherish my Catholic friends and neighbours.

"I would never intentionally use words that would cause them offence."

Speaking later on Wednesday, First Minister Arlene Foster said it was right that Mr Poots had issued a statement, and that she deemed it the "end of the matter".

"We have huge issues to deal with, the clarity was there in his statement," she said.

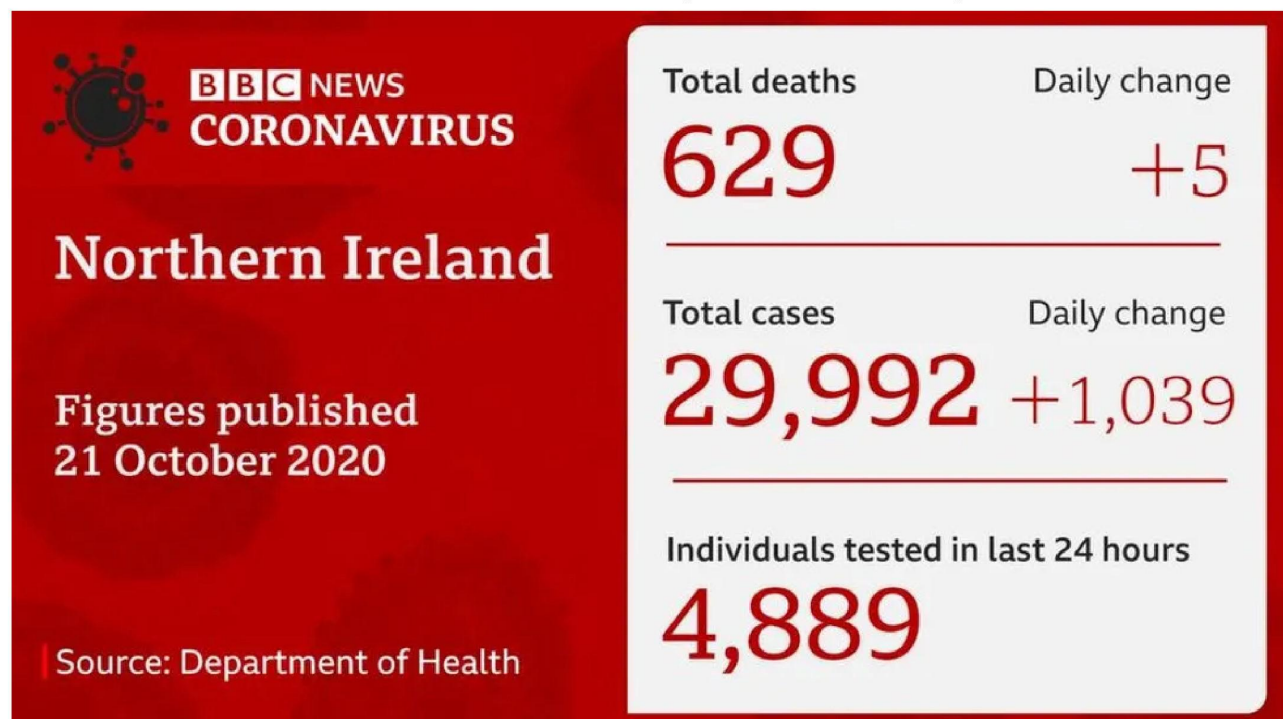
Mrs Foster said her party had called for apologies from other Stormont parties on occasions that had not been forthcoming, but said her focus now was on tackling the virus.

"Edwin has made his statement today, I stand by it and it's right that he did do that," she added.

Sinn Féin's John O'Dowd had previously said Mr Poots's comments about virus levels in different council areas were a "disgrace" and should be withdrawn.

On Tuesday, Northern Ireland's chief medical officer Dr Michael McBride said the Department of Health did not collate Covid-19 data on the basis of "political or religious affiliations".

"At no stage would we have publicly or privately suggested there was a link between the transmission rates of Covid-19 and people's political affiliation or religion - there is no such evidence and our approach throughout all of this has been guided by the evidence," he said.



Five Covid-19 related deaths have been reported in Northern Ireland by the Department of Health on Wednesday

A further five Covid-19 related deaths have been reported in Northern Ireland by the Department of Health on Wednesday, bringing its total to 629.

The department also reported an additional 1,039 positive cases of the virus, meaning there have been 29,992 cases of coronavirus reported in Northern Ireland.

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Mr Poots had spoken to UTV on Friday, openly criticising the imposition of the new regulations, which are in place for the next four weeks.

"I will abide by the regulations, as have most people in my community," said Mr Poots.

"What I'm saying is, those people who didn't abide by them, including the Sinn Féin leadership - because a lot of this started shortly after [\*\*the Bobby Storey funeral\*\*](#).

"A lot of the problems started after that event and people in that community saw the breaking of the rules.

"That's why there is a difference between nationalist areas and unionist areas - and the difference is around six to one."

In his statement on Wednesday, Mr Poots maintained that "Covid-19 is spread by bad behaviour, such as that exemplified at the Bobby Storey funeral".

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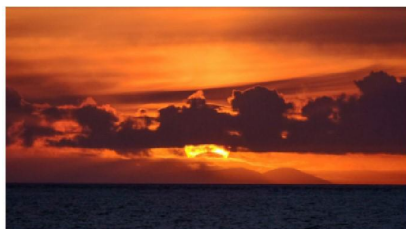
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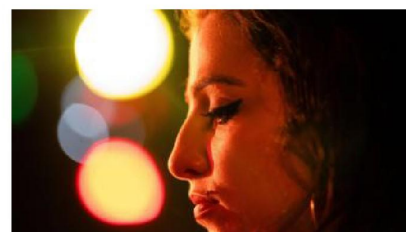
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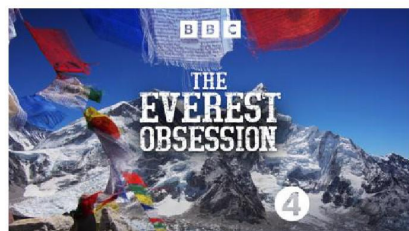


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