

## COVID-19 - The science on delay phase – schools and mass gatherings

- For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild infection. If you have new symptoms of coronavirus infection, however mild, stay at home and do not leave your house for 7 days from when your symptoms started. This action will help protect others in your community whilst you are infectious.
- This Government is taking a **phased approach** to tackling the virus: to 'contain, delay, mitigate, and research'. This approach is the result of direct and continuous consultation with the Chief Medical Officer and globally recognised experts.
- We are now in the **delay** phase of our plan (our research and work to mitigate its impact is continuous). This is now not just an attempt to contain the disease, as far as possible, but to delay its spread.
- If we delay the peak even by a few weeks, then our NHS will be in a stronger state and we have more time for medical research. We can also act to stretch the peak of the disease over a longer period, so that our society is better able to cope.

### The science

- At all stages, we have been guided by the science. We will do the right thing, at the right time. This will be a long-haul and it is important we don't do things in advance of need.
- If certain measures are taken too soon, there is a chance the public will become fatigued and not take the necessary action before we reach the peak of the virus
- We need to protect the most vulnerable in our population who are at most risk of serious illness and dying.
- If restrictions are imposed too soon, this will not protect enough people because the number of cases are too small. If we did that now, most people would not have coronavirus and you may have to ask them to do this all over again. The effect of that will wane because people get tired of being asked to do it again and again. So, the timing is critical and that's true across all of the interventions.

## **Science - Possible questions...**

### **Why has the advice changed to 7 days self-isolation and not 14 days?**

- While it looks as though with this virus people have five days of mild virus infection, then a small proportion of people get a second phase where they have some sort of immune response to it which causes the damage. The elderly and people with pre-existing conditions are much more likely to get that. So, during the period of peak transmission we need to protect them at that phase.

### **Why will people no longer be tested – how will you know if the virus is spreading?**

- We are asking people to self-isolate for 7 days if they experience new symptoms. The majority of these individuals would not be tested. Some testing will continue as needed, but it may be prioritised. For example, health professionals showing symptoms may be tested to ensure that they are not self-isolating unnecessarily at a time when their skills and experience are needed.

## **Herd Immunity**

- There currently isn't any herd immunity as this is a new virus
- The only way at the moment to achieve personal immunity is to be infected with the virus, but the vast majority of us will only experience mild symptoms
- Work is being undertaken worldwide to develop an effective vaccine but this does take time.

## **Schools**

- Closing schools has minimal effect on the spread of the virus as they would need to be closed for 13-16 weeks, which will be unrealistic for many families to manage.

- Another more important consequence is that this may lead to more children being cared for by grandparents at a time when they might be most vulnerable as they are more likely to be in an At Risk Group.
- We've published guidance which provides advice to schools and other educational settings on the appropriate steps to take in relation to COVID-19, this advice will be updated regularly.
- The clear message to schools at present is to remain open. We are working closely with the other UK nations on issues such as potential school closures and the implications for all pupils are part of those discussions.

### **Mass Gatherings**

- Anyone with flu-symptoms should avoid the risk of spreading their infection, whatever that infection may be, by staying at home and recovering.
- For those hosting sporting events, whatever their size, attendees and participants should stay up to date on the government's latest advice on how to avoid catching or spreading the virus.
- For those travelling to sporting events overseas, the Foreign Office's travel advice should be followed and travellers should note that apart from the countries and territories named in that advice, the government is not presently advising against travel to anywhere else.
- For those who offer community and leisure services, such as running a local football team; or running a gym; hand hygiene should be strongly promoted and encouraged and equipment should be thoroughly cleaned and wiped down after use. The government is planning to publish specific advice on this shortly.
- There is presently no reason people should stop doing their daily sport and physical activities as they normally would.

### **Possible mass gathering questions...**

#### **Should I continue to attend or run sports events?**

- That there is presently no scientific evidence to support the closure or cancellation of sporting events, but this may change as the situation evolves.

**Why is the Six Nations game going ahead this weekend? Premier League as well as FAW have cancelled all games until 4<sup>th</sup> April.**

The 4 CMOs position on the science not supporting restrictions on mass gatherings at this point in time is very clear, and has been reinforced by the HSS Minister re the rugby. It's the prerogative of individual sporting bodies to make their own decisions and FAW will no doubt have been influenced by UEFA.

**Scotland are cancelling gatherings over 500 people – why isn't Wales doing the same?**

- Scotland has received the same scientific evidence as Wales.
- Scotland has made this decision not on the basis that it will have an impact on the spread of the virus, but to release the NHS and police resources that would usually be needed for these events so that they are available to plan and deliver the response to Covid19.

**WRU statement...**

"Tomorrow's (Saturday) Guinness Six Nations clash with Scotland at Principality Stadium will go ahead as planned.

"WRU representatives have been in dialogue with Welsh Assembly Government minister for Health and Social Services Vaughan Gething, who provided much needed clarity on the Cobra meeting held yesterday.

"Throughout the WRU board have followed the scientific advice of government, Public Health Wales and medical experts and determined that any game would be held or postponed based on that advice."

**Related recent lines issues...**

**School trip cancellations**

"We are doing all we can to slow the spread of coronavirus in Wales, based on the evidence and advice available to all four UK governments that was issued advising

against overseas school trips. We are working with the UK Government, the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive to respond to the coronavirus outbreak.”

### **Children missing out on free meals**

“We’ve published guidance which provides advice to schools and other educational settings on the appropriate steps to take in relation to COVID-19, this advice will be updated regularly. The clear message to schools at present is to remain open. We are working closely with the other UK nations on issues such as potential school closures and the implications for all pupils are part of those discussions.”

### **Individual powers**

“The Welsh Government can act within its devolved powers, in line with advice from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales. We have been working very closely with the UK government and other devolved nations to make sure the emergency legislation announced recently will provide effective new powers across the whole of the UK. Any new powers relating to devolved functions in Wales will be exercisable by Welsh Ministers.”

### **Frustrations within WG**

“We are doing all we can to slow the spread of coronavirus in Wales, based on the evidence and advice available to all four UK governments. We are working with the UK Government, the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive to respond to the coronavirus outbreak.”

### **Teacher / pupil illness**

“We have not been made aware of increased staff or pupil absence at present. Public Health Wales has published guidance for people concerned they may have symptoms of the coronavirus.”

### **Schools shut / cleaned**

“We are in regular contact with local authorities and have not been informed of any maintained school closures at present.”

## **Tourism**

“Visit Wales and the Welsh Government are carefully monitoring the ongoing situation and will review and adjust planned activity according to the situation. Tourism businesses and stakeholders in Wales are advised to visit the Business Wales website for specific guidance for businesses and to regularly visit the Public Health Wales website for up-to-date public health information.”

### **Potential tweets:**

- The decisions we have made regarding COVID-19 are based on clinical and scientific evidence. It is important to time social distancing measures carefully. If we introduce measures too early they will not protect us at the time of greatest risk but could have a huge social impact.
- In the coming weeks we will be introducing further social distancing measures. Our decisions are based on careful modelling of the impacts of these measures. We need to do the right things at the right time. We will clearly announce any new measures you need to take. Please continue to follow the advice.