

Public Health Wales advice to the Chief Medical Officer for Wales: Post-Christmas next steps in COVID-19 response

11 December 2020

1. Introduction

Following the submission of an advisory note on 7 December 2020, Public Health Wales (PHW) is submitting this advisory note to inform the next steps to be taken to respond to the pandemic in Wales, following the Christmas period (23 – 27 December 2020). Our advice builds on the advice notes submitted to the Chief Medical Officer on the 12 October, 24 October, 5 November and 7 December 2020. It recognises that any decisions will need to balance different considerations: reducing transmission, protecting essential health and social care services and minimising the wider harm effects including those arising from impacts on the economy and, notably, the wider impact on population health outcomes in the medium/long term (for example, undiagnosed and untreated conditions, and other health harms including mental health) as well as any unintended impacts arising from further interventions.

2. Current Epidemiological Summary

The current weekly incidence in the community is around 400 per 100,000 (403.8, sample dates 2/12/20 to 8/12/20 inclusive). This compares to 153 per 100,000 in England (79.3- 191.2 by region, report dated 10/12/20, using sample dates 29/11/20 to 5/12/20 inclusive) and 101.2 per 100,000 in Scotland.

The all-Wales doubling time estimate from Wednesday 9/12 was 11.0 days, which suggests that today's incidence of 400 per 100,000 will be 800 per 100,000 by 22/12/20. In the week ending 6/12/20, 512 patients were admitted to hospitals (358 known COVID and 154 who tested positive at admission) and these admissions are continuing to rise.

It is highly likely that the Christmas Bubble arrangements that have been agreed at UK-level will lead to further increase in mixing and transmission. The impact of this will be more severe if the levels in the population are high when the Christmas period begins (23rd December 2020). Also, it is too early to measure the effects of last week's hospitality changes and next week's school changes.

3. Public Health Wales Advice

With regard to the current rate of infection of COVID-19 in Wales, our recommendation in our advisory note of 7 December 2020 still stands – i.e. we recommend that urgent additional action before Christmas is required. We further recommended that for the post-Christmas period, further additional restrictions will also need to be in place to control the pandemic and the exponential growth of the virus across Wales.

Our previous advice notes have highlighted the importance of having regard to the wider impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wales and we continue to highlight these points notably in relation to the impact on mental health and well-being (particularly in young people). We have also

referenced the needs to balance a regulatory approach with an approach that seeks to enable our population to adopt and maintain the right behaviours.

However, the current situation with the continued spread of the virus in Wales and the risk of immediate harm from the virus is such that the main focus should be to save lives and protect wider NHS and social care services.

Our key advice for the post-Christmas period is therefore the re-introduction of a suite of national 'additional restrictions' similar to those introduced in March 2020. This intervention needs to be in place for a sufficiently long period to achieve adequate control of the pandemic with a clear exit strategy for easing the restrictions by prioritising key sectors such as education as soon as is practicable.

Public Health Wales will work to provide further advice by the end of next week that will encompass strategies for monitoring and evaluating the effect of restrictions, guidance on thresholds for easing of restrictions, and strategies to support safe easing for different population cohorts (e.g. education).