

DRAFT: CMO Advice
Covid-19 Weekly Review
15 December 2021

The Covid-19 pandemic in Wales is still dominated by the delta variant with community transmission at a high but stable level and our health care system delivering against manageable pressures. We still need to watch the evolving wave of delta infection as it progresses across Europe.

Our understanding of the omicron variant is increasing; as previously noted, it has a clear transmissibility advantage and significant prospects for vaccine escape. The case to hospitalisation, case to ITU admission, and case to mortality rates remain unclear.

Modelling from a variety of sources is converging on a high likelihood of a very significant wave of community infection resulting in hospitalisation, ITU requirement, and deaths equal to or in excess of previous waves.

This comes at a time when capacity in the NHS is constrained because of delta wave infections, planned care recovery, and urgent/unscheduled care needs exacerbated by significant pressures in both primary care and social care.

The acceleration of the Covid booster programme is a critical mitigation and should continue to be expedited.

The public health consensus in Wales and the wider UK is that it is highly unlikely that the booster programme alone will prevent a very significant burden of direct covid-related harm in the period immediately after Christmas. Ministers will wish to note PHW advice on this issue¹.

I therefore recommend that Ministers should urgently consider the reintroduction of measures aimed at reducing viral transmission through population mixing. Protections which should be considered are outlined in our Covid (Urgent) scenario with the revised Coronavirus Control plan (autumn/winter 2021 Update). The most immediate and significant benefits will come from reducing opportunities for large numbers of people to mix in poorly ventilated indoor spaces. As with previous waves, consideration should also be given to protections aimed at reducing mixing between households.

Alignment of protections across the UK Nations will be of benefit in terms of public communication and compliance. The omicron wave in Wales appears to be lagging behind those of Scotland and England (London in particular) and we should continue to press for common solutions to the threat which all UK nations are facing.

¹ Public Health Wales COVID-19 advice to the Chief Medical Officer for Wales No. 23 Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions during scenario 'COVID URGENT' of the Coronavirus Control Plan

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