

Chief Medical Officer Advice on 21 Day Review

I have reviewed the proposed amendments to the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations 2020 which represent a precautionary approach to an increasing number of COVID-19 cases since the last review; mandating face coverings in indoor environments, limiting indoor meetings while signalling some further modest easements in the Autumn.

My advice continues to be informed by the outputs of the UK Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE) and the Welsh Technical Advisory Cell (TAC), and through discussions with Chief Medical Officers in the 4 Nations and the Chief Economic Advisor in Wales.

Household transmission is the biggest risk and source of infection, evident from recent experiences and intelligence from contact tracing. There is now a need for action and a compelling case for a tightening of our position regarding indoor contacts. I see this as the right approach as children return to school, universities resume, businesses re-open and people return to work. These are changes which should help to minimise the socio-economic harms that result from adverse labour market experiences, which particularly affect young people and people in lower paid jobs, those with poor health and disability, or who suffer discrimination.

We see a relatively steep rise in infections in different urban locations, particularly across the south east, with the first local outbreak control mechanisms being implemented in Caerphilly to slow further transmission. Other similar actions may need to be taken elsewhere in due course. Limiting household interactions across Wales offers a proportionate response without restricting economic and educational activity. This restriction of freedom however, should be supported by a strong national message to the Welsh population on the need to be vigilant and take the necessary preventative measures to prevent infection; social distancing, regular hand washing and reducing social contacts.

It is appropriate that as incidence has increased we now move from an advisory to mandatory requirement to wear face coverings in indoor environments where social distancing is not possible or difficult to observe. Travellers returning from non-exempt countries with high incidence rates still represent another potential source of infection and should self-isolate for 14 days when they return. This risk will diminish if our numbers increase.

I am concerned that young people present a gateway for this disease back into the wider population. There are various possible reasons for this, but they have more to lose socially from compliance with restrictions and less to gain as their disease is usually not severe. Whatever the reason, every effort should be made to communicate meaningfully to those under 30 years of age so they take measures to avoid the spread of the virus. The main risk is that young people, many of whom are asymptomatic, will spread the virus to family members who are more vulnerable, so the current low levels of hospital activity are likely to change.

Dr Chris Jones
Deputy Chief Medical Officer
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