

**Public Health Wales advice to the Chief Medical Officer for Wales:  
Christmas Period 2020 and response to the  
Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales**

**15 December 2020**

**1 Introduction**

Following recent submissions of the advisory notes on the 7 and 11 of December 2020, Public Health Wales (PHW) is submitting this further advisory note in response to the publication (14 December 2020) of the [Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales](#). Our advice builds on the advice notes submitted to the Chief Medical Officer on the 12 October, 24 October, 5 November 7 and 11 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 now above 400 per 100,000 (412.8 on 14/12, sample dates 04/12/2020 to 10/12/2020 inclusive). This compares to 173 per 100,000 in England (83.4- 242.0 by region, report dated 14/12/20, using sample dates 3/12/20 to 9/12/20 inclusive) and 110 per 100,000 in Scotland (sample dates 05-12 December 2020). Today's estimate (412) may be underestimated due to changes in data flows from the Wales laboratory system over the weekend.

The all-Wales doubling time estimate from the 13 December was 9.1 days, which suggests that today's incidence of 412 per 100,000 will be over 800 per 100,000 by the 23 December. On the 12 December there were 76 new COVID hospital admissions (44 on 5/12) and 9 admissions to critical care (4 on 5/12), with 1482 current inpatients (1281 on 5/12) including 56 in critical care (40 in 5/12).

It is likely that the Christmas Bubble arrangements that have been agreed at a 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 (23 December 2020). Also, it is too early to measure the effects of last week's hospitality changes and this week's school changes.

**3 Public Health Wales Advice**

The publication of the Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales is welcome. The indicators for action are clearly laid out and we acknowledge that there is a legislative process to be undertaken.

In providing our advice, we have also had regard to emerging information relating to the epidemiology and proposed actions of other International countries, an indication of this is included in the attached appendix.

Reflecting on the current epidemiology above, (and with knowledge of the reported pressures on local Test Trace and Protect (TTP) teams, coupled with the escalating stress on the NHS system including the reported cancellation of elective procedures in two Health Boards at time of writing), our interpretation is that Wales is currently at alert level 4.

### **Pre - Christmas period**

In line with our previous advisory note of the 7 December 2020 we recommend that urgent additional action is required, as soon as practicable, before the Christmas period. Actions taken should be consistent with those described for alert level 4 in the Coronavirus Control plan.

### **Christmas 'relaxation' period**

Given the continued increase in cases, our concerns have increased with respect to the Christmas period of the 23 to 27 December 2020. Noting that a UK wide agreement is currently in place, if the opportunity arises to reconsider this arrangement, we would recommend that this period of "regulated relaxation" is reviewed considering current circumstances in Wales.

Many people will have already made arrangements for the Christmas period, and hence there may be issues with people adhering to any changes in restrictions between 23 and 27 December. Further, in considering options for this we also recognise that any amendment of the UK wide agreed Christmas arrangements also carries a risk of losing engagement more widely with the population and thus risking their adherence to further restrictions both pre and post the Christmas relaxation period.

However, given the continually deteriorating position, our key advice remains that household mixing should be minimised.

*In considering approaches to achieving this, our advice focusses on reducing both the number of households or persons able to mix **and** the period of time that such household/person mixing is permitted. The more the reduction of each, the more impact the actions are likely to have on limiting transmission.*

Examples for consideration within the current Christmas 'relaxation period' are below. These can be considered in combination, again, the greater the reduction in contacts the greater the likely impact on transmission of COVID -19.

- Implementing alert level 4 measures as soon as practicable and continuing with them throughout the Christmas period.

- Reducing the relaxation period e.g. from 5 days to 2 days, with stronger messaging that household mixing must be as limited as far as possible.
- Reducing the numbers of households allowed to meet during the Christmas period e.g. whilst respecting the needs of single person households, reducing the numbers of households able to meet to two households rather than three or specify the maximum number of individuals who can meet.
- Bringing in alert level 4 measures in terms of closure of non-essential retail, as early as practicable and no later than the 26 December (Boxing Day).

### **Post - Christmas period**

We further recommend that for the post-Christmas period (immediately following the period of regulated relaxation), we would expect that alert level 4 measures would need to be in place to control the pandemic and the exponential growth of the virus across Wales.

The alert level 4 measures may need to be in place for an extended period of time, which will increase the wider impacts of this pandemic. In furtherance of our previous advice note of the 11 December 2020, PHW will work with WG to support strategies to maximise the suppression of the virus, whilst minimising the wider impacts including thresholds for easements and testing strategies focussed on targeted sectors.

## **Appendix: International restrictions for Christmas- review**

### **1 Summary of incidence trends (ECDC)**

The ECDC overview report on COVID-19 gives an overall 14 day incidence of 395 per 100,000 (range 58-1182).

Among 30 countries with case rates above 60 per 100,000, 6 had sustained increases in incidence- Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania)

22 countries had stable or decreasing rates ((Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the UK). However, some of these countries have reported recent increases in daily case numbers (e.g. Netherlands, below).

Case incidences in those aged over 65 have been increasing in a larger group of 25 countries (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden).

### **2 Restrictions**

Several countries have recently reported that they plan increased restrictions over Christmas, not all of which have currently rising incidences. Incidences here are for a 14 day period, rather than the 7 day periods reported for the UK nations. All quoted below are lower than the current Wales incidence on a 7 day basis (412.8 per 10<sup>5</sup>, with a 14 day rate of 563/10<sup>5</sup>), although the rates depend on the access to and uptake of testing in each country.

**Italy** (14 day incidence 545.8/10<sup>5</sup>) has introduced restrictions on inter-regional travel over Christmas (21/12 to 6/1) and a tiered system of restrictions, with the highest risk areas closing all bars, restaurants and most shops, but keeping open essential shops and services. There will be a national curfew from 22:00 to 05:000

There are reports that the **Netherlands** (411.4/10<sup>5</sup>) are planning to introduce a lockdown from 15/12 until 19 January (including closure of schools, non-essential shops and museums), with a daily increase in the number of reported cases. Restrictions are to be eased for 3 days over Christmas, allowing households to have 3 guests (not counting children <13).

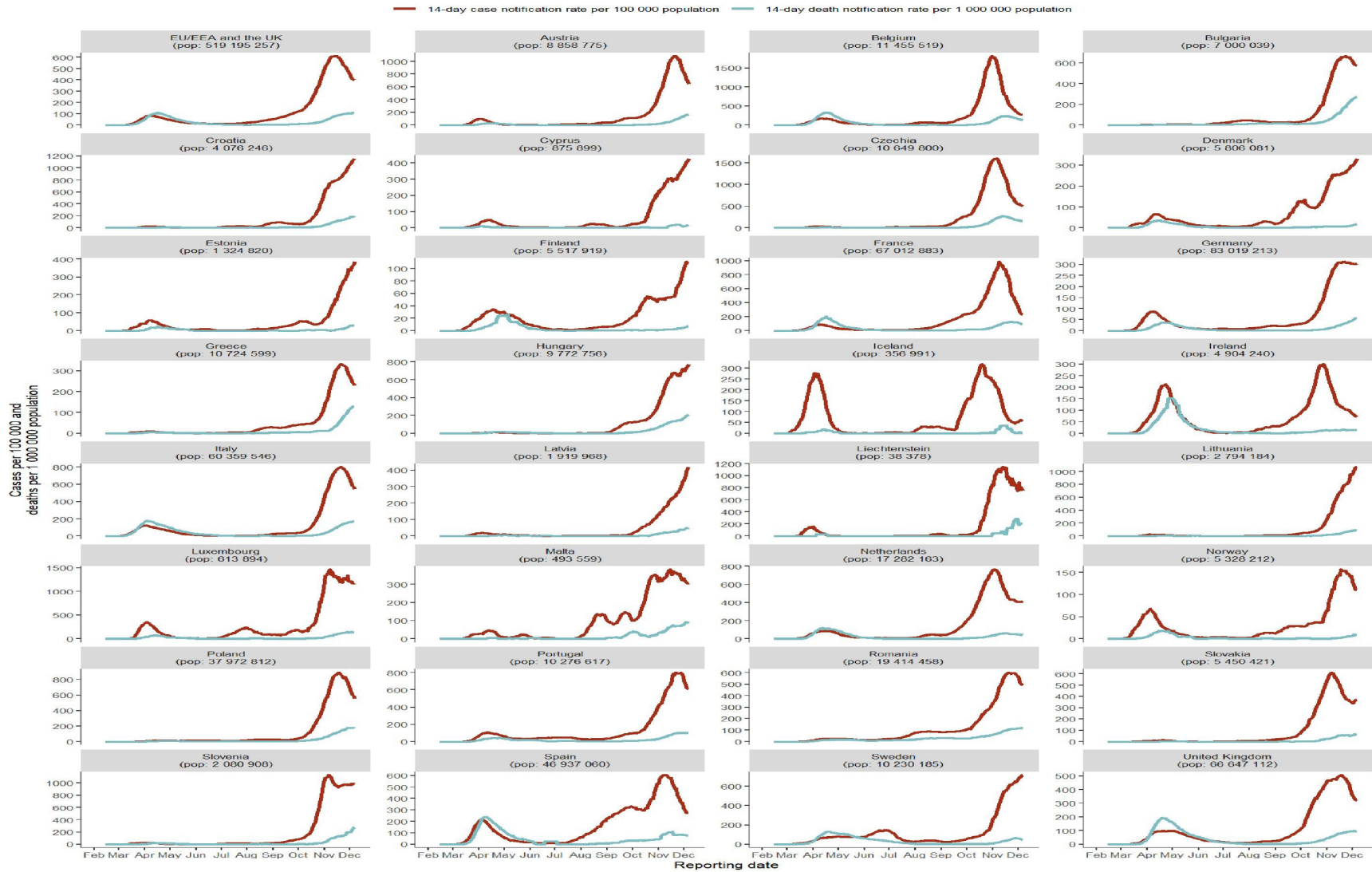
**Germany** (304.8/10<sup>5</sup>) has recently announce a lockdown <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55292614> from 16 December to 10 January, following a rise in cases. This will include closure of non-essential shops and schools. There is a relaxation on the limit for household mixing from 24-26 December, with one household being able to invite up to 4 close

family members from other households. France ( $230.4/10^5$ ) , with falling incidence, lifted their lockdown imposed on 28 November on 15/12. However, there will be a nationwide curfew from 20:00 to 06:00, excepting Christmas (but not New Years) eve.

**Austria** has recently come out of a lockdown but is keeping restaurants and bars closed over the Christmas period, and limiting hotels to business travel.

**EU/EEA and the UK: 14-day COVID-19 case and death notification rates**

Regional totals as of 6 Dec 2020: 13 989 002 cases (earliest 25 Jan, latest 6 Dec 2020), 347 294 deaths (15 Feb, 6 Dec 2020)



ECDC. Figure produced 10 December 2020. Source: Epidemic intelligence, national daily data

## **Sources**

<https://covid19-country-overviews.ecdc.europa.eu/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-53640249>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55058362>