

COVID-19 NOTE

3 December 2021

As of Close 03/12/21	Northern Ireland	Total UK
7-day average cases per 100k	656.2 (up from 623.9 on 26 November)	435.6 (up from 4239.1 on 26 November)
Vaccines (Total Doses)	3,085,767	116,467,922
R Rate / Av Growth Rate Per Day	0.9 to 1.1 -3% to +2	0.9 to 1.1 -1% to +1% (*Data for England)
Hospitalisations Patients in ICU	326 30	1,759 287

Omicron Variant

- On 26 November, the World Health Organisation (WHO) identified a new variant of concern which originated in South Africa which they given the classification of "Omicron"
- There are some concerns that the mutations of this emerging variant will make it more transmissible and less susceptible to vaccines however the WHO has been clear that further testing will be required over the next number of weeks for scientists to fully understand the genetic makeup and implications of this new variant.
- Forty-two cases of Omicron have now been confirmed in the UK. Currently no cases of Omicron have been confirmed in NI, however the NI DoH expects to confirm cases in NI within days.

Response to the Omicron Variant

- UKG promptly acted by putting in place tighter restrictions including adding ten countries to the UK red list.
- In addition all vaccinated arrivals from non- red list countries (with exception of travel across the CTA) are now required to undergo a PCR test on or before day 2. Unvaccinated arrivals will continue to follow the existing, more onerous, testing and isolation regime.
- In England, face coverings must now be worn in shops and shopping centres, transport hubs and on public transport.
- There has also been a renewed emphasis on the booster vaccine with UKG announcing a major expansion of the booster jab rollout on Monday 29 November. Boosters will now be offered to all over-18s in the UK, with children aged 12 to 15 invited for a second jab of the vaccine.
- NI aligned with the rest of the UK with respect to increased measures for international travel - both in terms of the red list and need for PCR testing.
- Other restrictions in NI remain largely as what was previously in place as mask wearing remained a requirement in NI along with reinforced messaging last week including working from home unless essential.
- Minister Swann updated the Assembly this week on measures to tackle the variant which also focused on the new to accelerate the booster programme.

ROI Travel Restrictions

- The Irish Govt also announced a number of new measures for international travel which will come into force from 00.01 on Sunday 5 December as summarised below:
 - Anyone who does not have proof of vaccination or recovery from Covid-19, will have to show a negative PCR test which was carried out no more than 48 hours before travel.
 - Anyone who has proof of vaccination or recovery from Covid19, will have to show a negative antigen test by an approved professional no more than 48 hours before travel.
- These measures will apply for a minimum period of two weeks and unlike the decision taken by UKG, travel **from GB to Ireland will also need to adhere to these measures** (travel from NI to Ireland remains exempt).