



Statement from the Executive on Covid-19 response

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News

A package of proposals will be brought forward by Ministers to the Executive for discussion and agreement including rates relief for businesses; options for the continuation of free school meals in the context of schools closing and steps to protect the most vulnerable in society, including the homeless, and support for the elderly, who are our priority.

Ministers have also agreed to special meetings of the Executive to discuss budget allocations in light of the pressure Covid-19 will have on departments and to halt non-critical work and allocate resources into the wider rapid response effort.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister will chair the meeting of the

Civil Contingencies Group (NI) on Wednesday where they will lead the response of the public sector, including blue light responders to the virus.

Along with Health Minister Swann, the First Minister and deputy First Minister participated in this afternoon's COBR meeting.

First Minister Arlene Foster said: **"These are unprecedented times and I am well aware of the real concern that exists across our community as the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases increase.**

"Further steps are being introduced to keep people safe. We know the burden that some of the necessary measures will have on families and individuals but it is important that they are followed and society pulls together to lessen the impacts of this disease."

The deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill said: **"This is the biggest public health crisis we have faced in a generation. The pandemic continues to escalate globally. Our priority is protecting our people and saving lives, which is paramount.**

"As an Executive, we are doing everything we can and will continue to do so in the days, weeks and months ahead but we all have a role to play to protect ourselves and others from Covid-19."

The Executive also paid tribute to our health service staff who are performing heroically during this unprecedented time.

Health Minister Robin Swann said: **"The entire health service is under growing pressure. Please don't add to that unless you have to. And please, please be patient and treat our great staff with respect. They are there to care for you - you are their first concern. Please show them the same concern and consideration."**

The Executive also urged the public to follow the public health advice. That means:

- Continue to wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds.
- Anyone with mild symptoms, should stay at home.

- You will not need to be tested.
- You should not contact or go to a GP surgery, Pharmacy or Emergency Department.
- If your symptoms worsen during your home isolation, or you are no better after seven days, seek medical advice by telephone.
- If you have an underlying health condition and you develop symptoms, then let your GP know.
- Please only call 999 if it's an emergency.

Notes to editors:

1. The new measures announced today following COBR include:

- When any member of a household is symptomatic, the whole household should stay at home for 14 days
- Stop non-essential contact with others and stop all unnecessary travel. Avoid pubs, clubs and other social venues.
- Those people in the more vulnerable categories should follow the guidance on social distancing more rigorously and by this weekend should shield themselves from social contact for 12 weeks.
- Emergency Services will no longer support mass gatherings.

2. Detailed information and advice on coronavirus is available from the Public Health Agency: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>

(<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>)

3. Media enquiries to TEO Press Office on 028 9037 8201. Out of office hours contact the Duty Press Officer on 028 9037 8110.

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