

**CDL-FMs Weekly Call**  
**Wednesday 18 November 2020**  
**16:30 - 17:30**

**AGENDA**

- 1. Determining a UK-wide approach to restrictions over the festive period**
- 2. Determining a UK-wide approach to intra-UK travel**
- 3. Mass testing**

**STEER**

1. The meeting will focus on Christmas planning and the implementation of mass testing using lateral flow (pregnancy style) tests. You should encourage FM and dFM on the benefits of the cross UK plan on mass testing.

*Christmas Planning - including Intra-UK Travel*

2. CDL and UKG are building towards an announcement next week, so that plans for Christmas can be properly communicated as the latest lockdown measures in England end. UKG are encouraging alignment, considering:
  - a. The large number of people travelling home for Christmas to a different nation in the UK.
  - b. Students who will want to travel back home over the Christmas holiday, with transport plans coordinated across the UK (incl. 17,000 NI students in GB)
  - c. The need for clear messaging in a period where compliance is a major concern.
3. Simon Ridley, the Director of the Covid-19 taskforce, is expected to present UKG's proposal. You should encourage alignment where possible but also be sensitive towards the stability of the Executive, particularly if FM/dFM state that the current timelines for alignment are not possible. Engagement with Senior Officials indicates that FM/dFM will not be able to provide a steer today, although TEO is working towards achieving a 'family Christmas'.

*Mass Testing*

4. There is significant political will in NI to implement mass testing, which would not only be beneficial to the Covid response, but would also be helpful from an Executive stability perspective, as it could allow the Executive to unite after what has been a difficult period. On last week's call, FM highlighted the use of mass testing as a possible part of Northern Ireland's exit strategy. DFM's focus was on clarifying what share of the tests Northern Ireland would receive.
5. We anticipate that a mass testing system would function similarly to the one currently in place in Liverpool, utilising the lateral flow test. The dFM spoke to the Mayor of Liverpool last weekend, and it was agreed that whilst mass testing presented as a great opportunity, it is one that would have to be administered sensitively in a Northern Ireland context, with due consideration for the role that the army would play in administering the scheme. Whilst the army couldn't have a public facing role, there may be scope to explore a hybrid model, where the army are still involved in distribution but behind the scenes. We don't expect any decisions to be taken on a four nations approach to mass testing, but you should encourage joined up working and support proposals for a pilot in NI which were raised by dFM last week.

## **LINES TO TAKE (if required)**

### *Mass Testing*

- *I am pleased to see the steps towards coordination on mass testing in the UK and the support on offer for DAs during a difficult winter period.*
- *I am mindful of the sensitivities of using overt military support in NI and suggest we continue to explore ways of making this work*
- *[If you wish to amplify dFM's request for a mass testing pilot in NI] I would support a mass testing pilot in Northern Ireland and am happy to help with future discussions on this.*

### *Christmas Planning*

- *I am keen to continue our close working with the NI Executive to coordinate our response to Covid-19.*
- *I support the ambition to achieve a Four Nations approach on Christmas planning.*
- *[If FM/dFM suggest timelines are difficult] I am also mindful of the need to ensure the right decisions are made for Northern Ireland and understand that key decisions in the coming weeks may inform plans for the festive period.*

## **BACKGROUND**

### **MASS TESTING**

A paper went to CDL and SoS Health yesterday (17th) that outlines:

- That the National Testing Programme was instigated on a four nations basis, with DA's receiving tests according to Barnett consequentials. Testing policy, on eligibility and prioritisation has been for DAs to decide.
- As mass testing has been able to utilise on new testing technologies, DA's have chosen to opt into some and not others, receiving Barnett consequential instead.
- These different strategies and technologies have a knock on policy impact on intra UK travel and self isolation policies.
- The half in/half out approach has been used on PPE and has been particularly complex to disaggregate allocations. The risk of continuing the precedent on mass testing is exacerbated by the potential of it also being used on vaccines.

### ***Christmas Relaxations of Rules***

CDL will lead the discussion. He is likely to look to secure a commitment from DAs to work on X-UK position by the start of next week; seek to establish DAs red lines on Christmas proposals; and propose a joint statement. He is likely to focus on

- Proposed 'Christmas bubble' model
- Duration of Christmas measures
- Extension of measures (private dwellings or extended indoor settings)

**Christmas bubble:** CDL will propose an extended bubble model for a short period over Christmas. People will be able to join with other households to form a bubble. During this time, people will be limited to meeting with that bubble only. Currently, a bubble of 3 households is under consideration. Polling suggested that limiting bubbles to 2 households would result in non-compliance. Travel guidelines or regulations will be suspended to allow travel between bubbles.

**Duration of Christmas measures:** UKG have proposed 22-28 December. TEO officials have suggested the timeframe for NI could be as short as 24 - 26 December. Officials have raised concerns that a limited duration starting on 24 December will force people to travel on the same day which could spread the virus. DAs are in agreement that it is preferable not to ease restrictions over New Year.

**Extension of measures:** CDL could raise whether bubbles can meet in other indoor settings, such as hospitality venues. There is a preference for CMOs from all administrations to discuss and advise on this issue. Restrictions for NI's re-opened hospitality sector (from 27 November) have not yet been decided. We would expect NI hospitality to lobby for significant easing of restrictions and a decision will be political.

**Other considerations:**

*Communications*

NI FM, and others, highlighted the need for aligned comms on last week's call. The PM is eager to make an announcement next week. However, without DA agreement on the approach there is an increased risk of divergence. DA officials have warned of the political risk that UKG is seen to pursue a joined-up approach when the timing is convenient for England. CDL will outline a timeline for announcements today.

***Intra-UK Travel***

CDL may test the following core principles for intra-UK travel in the festive period, which would inform public communications with immediate effect.

- Individuals should not travel into or out of areas where there are local restrictions against travel.
- However, the UK government and devolved administrations all agree that there will be a number of common reasons for which travel should continue - principally around work, education and medical care - which are reasonable exemptions from travel restrictions (please see list below).
- Individuals should not travel to other areas within the UK in order to circumvent local restrictions. These restrictions have been introduced for good reason, to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Individuals should know the rules before they travel - and follow the rules both where they live and where they are going.
- While travelling, individuals should adhere to safer travel guidance on social distancing and car sharing, including complying with the law on the wearing of face coverings. Even if an exemption applies, people must not travel if they have symptoms of coronavirus, live in the same household as someone who has symptoms, or are required to self-isolate.

- If an exemption for travelling does apply, on arrival at the destination, individuals must follow all national and local rules on social distancing. Travel restrictions are only one part of containing the virus.
- The UK government and the devolved administrations will continue to work together to ensure that communications to citizens on travel within the UK are clear and coherent.

CDL will seek agreement on proposals to

- Deliver a UK-wide public communications campaign to ensure consistent messaging on X-UK travel
- Develop detail around the principles to inform clear guidance and aim for future consistency across regulations
- Support greater compliance and - where necessary - ensure police are able to enforce these restrictions in all parts of the UK by end November.