

CMO/CSA Updated Advice

5. As summarised in the R paper, both case numbers and hospital inpatient numbers are currently increasing rapidly with a doubling time of 8 days. Of particular concern, we are currently tracking above the pessimistic scenario in terms of hospital bed occupancy, although there is considerable uncertainty in relation to this as the pessimistic and central scenario curves do not reliably separate until the end of July.
6. Publicly available data demonstrates that a lower percentage of the NI adult population has received a first dose of vaccination at this time compared with the other UK countries. The percentage of additional first doses administered in respective jurisdictions compared to NI is approximately + 6% for England, + 8 for Scotland and + 10% for Wales. As a consequence of this, NI is at risk of a bigger wave proportionally than the rest of the UK, by as much as 50% based on the proportion of the adult population who remain unvaccinated.
7. In addition, it is important to note that the proportion of under 18s is higher in NI than other UK countries. This means that overall levels of population immunity are further reduced.
8. We have previously shown that a 5% increase in adult vaccine uptake from 85% to 90% will result in an approximately 50% decrease in cases and community admissions at the peak of this wave. Ministers will therefore need to consider carefully the potential implications for any further relaxations as compared to other jurisdictions.
9. Any further relaxations at this time will accelerate COVID spread and the size of the peak of the current wave, it is not possible to model the effects of specific changes due to the uncertainties involved. Given the current position in relation to hospital admissions and occupancy, it would be best from the perspective of COVID transmission not to allow further relaxations until it is clear whether we are

OFFICIAL - EXECUTIVE

Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, 12 pt, Bold

Formatted: Centered

following the central or pessimistic modelling scenario. We will not have sufficient data and analysis available to assess this until the end of July, at which time we will be in a position to advise whether or not a decision to allow further relaxations would align with a key principle agreed by the Executive in May 2020: *“to ensure as far as possible that the health care system has the capacity to care for COVID-19 patients and care for all patients, present and future.”*

10. In summary, at this point ratification of the proposals could not be recommended from a health perspective. As always the Executive will need to weigh the benefits of delaying further relaxations against family, societal and economic considerations.

Removal of Linked Household (Bubbles) Proposal

11. **Annex A** at point 5 refers to the proposal to remove linked households, or bubbles, from the regulations. Currently two households can be linked and this enables them to meet in larger numbers at private dwellings and sit together at hospitality venues if there is more than 6 people in the bubble.
12. The intention behind this proposal was to simplify the Regulations and the associated messaging. However work in preparing the amendment has highlighted that an unintended consequence would be to effectively remove the ability of existing bubbles of between 6-10 people to meet together at hospitality venues. This would increase restrictions for those in this situation, which is not intended. Whilst the bubbles references could be removed from the Regulations for private dwellings, this would in all likelihood complicate the messaging, as bubbles would apply in some situations but not others.
13. I therefore propose that, to ensure there is no unintended enhancement of restrictions for those currently availing of the bubbles provisions, this remains in the Regulations unchanged until such times as the Executive agrees to remove the cap on the numbers of households and persons meeting together both at private dwellings and at hospitality venues.

Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, 12 pt, Bold

Formatted: Centered

OFFICIAL - EXECUTIVE

**ANNEX A – UPDATED CMO AND CSA ADVICE ON PROPOSALS FOR
RATIFICATION BY THE EXECUTIVE 22 JULY 2021**

Reference	Relaxation as agreed by the Executive on 8th July 2021	CMO and CSA opinion 21st July 2021
1.	Remove the restriction on audiences in seated theatres and concert halls and other such venues Entry to performances for audiences will be by ticket only. Tickets must be purchased in advance of the performance. Audiences for indoor events must have allocated seating and remain seated. Social distancing of 1m required	Moderate risk.
2.	Return of conferences and exhibitions	High risk, due to likely nature of interactions in and around events.
3.	Indoor Domestic Settings: Permit ten people from no more than three households. If one household has ten members, the maximum is increased to 15 from no more than three households Does not include children 12 and under.	Moderate increase in risk over current arrangements, though may significantly increase the numbers of people required to self- isolate as a result of becoming contacts.
4.	Outdoor Domestic Settings: Permit 15 people from an unlimited number of households. Does not include children 12 and under	Low risk provided that interactions do not move indoors and appropriate mitigations are maintained.
5.	Remove the linked households/bubble provision.	See paragraphs 10-12 above