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Executive agrees two-week circuit breaker

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The Executive has agreed to introduce a two week circuit breaker to slow the spread of Coronavirus in the community and protect the health service.

Those businesses planning to open tomorrow under the current restrictions can do so, but will have to close again next Friday.

The measures agreed by the Executive are:

- Closure of all retail except essential retail that was permitted to stay open in the Spring;
- Off licences will remain open, with an 8pm closing;
- Closure of close contact services, and driving instruction (not motorcycles), except close contact for Film and TV production; those ancillary to medical, health and social care services; and elite-sports therapeutic services - i.e. – as 13 October- 19 November;
- Closure of all hospitality (except for accommodation for essential travel). Takeaway and delivery, and food and drink in motorway services, airports and harbour terminals remain open;
- Closure of all leisure and entertainment (to include all soft play areas, gyms, swimming pools etc);
- Sporting events only permitted for elite sports. Individual/household outdoor exercise and school PE to continue;



Covid-19 Executive Update

- Elite sports events behind closed doors without spectators;
- No household gatherings of more than one household, other than current arrangements for linked households (bubbles), with current exceptions for caring, maintenance, house moves, etc.;
- Closure of places of worship, except for weddings, civil partnerships and funerals. Remain with 25 max for weddings and funerals;
- Stay at home, work from home if at all possible, otherwise only leave for essential purposes such as education, healthcare needs, to care for others or outdoor exercise;
- Schools and childcare to remain open;
- Universities / FE to provide learning at distance except where it is essential to provide it face to face;
- Public parks and outdoor play areas remain open;
- Stay at home in guidance, with liaison with PSNI on policing and police visibility; and
- Financial support package to be developed over next few days.

The Executive took the decision to introduce the circuit breaker from next Friday after modelling indicated it offered a greater likelihood of avoiding further restrictions before Christmas.

Ministers today heard that the R number was around 1 and that while the current restrictions have had some positive impact, hospital inpatients numbers are still at a higher level than the first wave and are declining slowly.

First Minister Arlene Foster said: **“The Executive has been presented today with the sobering prospect of our hospitals becoming overwhelmed within weeks.**

“It is clear that a tough, carefully timed, intervention is required to give us the best chance to have a safe and happy Christmas and further into the new year period.

“The Executive has taken the decision to put in place a short, sharp circuit-breaker from Friday November 27 to reset and drive down infection rates right across Northern Ireland.

"This is not the position we had hoped to be in as the current phase of restrictions comes towards an end. The R rate has unfortunately not dropped as far, or for as long, as had been estimated. We have taken some time today to look at the reasons for this. Sadly it is clear that a careless minority have significantly undermined the sacrifices of the many.

"So I want to take this opportunity to say to those who feel it's acceptable to flout public health advice, think again.

"We all need to work together to save our hospitals, to save Christmas, to save lives."

Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill said: **"The Executive has given detailed consideration to the evidence in front of us and listened very carefully to the medical and scientific advice on the progression of the epidemic. It paints a stark picture of the situation we are facing into.**

"Seventy six people have lost their lives to Covid-19 in the last week alone. Hospital occupancy currently stands at 100%. Our hospitals remain under extreme pressure, as do the staff we depend on to deliver care. To do nothing would inevitably lead to the entire system becoming completely overwhelmed.

"This has informed our agreement to introduce enhanced restrictions for a period of two weeks from next Friday, 27 November. The modelling indicated that this will be most effective in reducing virus transmission and offered a greater likelihood of avoiding further restrictions before Christmas.

"We know this will be difficult for people to hear, but this is a necessary intervention to protect our health service. And it will give us the best possible chance of getting to the other side of the Christmas period. Our actions as we approach Christmas are crucial."

Health Minister Robin Swann said: **"I want to thank my fellow Executive Ministers for supporting the recommendations I brought to today's meeting. This virus has tested us all across society in ways we have never been tested before. Nowhere has the pressure been more severe than in our health and social care system.**

"Without this further intervention, there was a very real risk of our hospitals being overwhelmed in the run up to Christmas. Care for Covid and non-Covid patients would have been in severe jeopardy. We must not let that happen.

"All of us now have to work really hard to achieve a happier festive season. Please

follow the public health advice and stay at home. Let's all redouble our efforts and look after each other."

Notes to editors:

1. Retail businesses permitted to stay open:

- Food retailers, including food markets, supermarkets, convenience stores and corner shops.
- Off licences and licensed shops selling alcohol (including breweries).
- Pharmacies (including non-dispensing pharmacies) and chemists.
- Newsagents.
- Homeware, building supplies and hardware stores.
- Petrol stations.
- Motor vehicle repair and MOT services.
- Bicycle shops.
- Taxi or vehicle hire businesses.
- Banks, building societies, credit unions, short term loan providers and cash points savings clubs and undertakings which by way of business operate currency exchange offices, transmit money (or any representation of money) by any means or cash cheques which are made payable to customers.
- Post offices.
- Funeral directors.
- Laundrettes and dry cleaners.
- Dental services, opticians, audiology services, chiropody, chiropractors, osteopaths and other medical or health services, including services relating to mental health.
- Veterinary surgeons and pet shops.
- Agricultural supplies shops.
- Storage and distribution facilities, including delivery drop off or collection points, where the facilities are in the premises of a business included in this list.
- Car parks.
- Public toilets.
- Garden centres and ornamental plant nurseries (but not cafes or restaurants in such premises).
- Livestock markets.

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