

The four CMOs have met and decided that we are not at health alert level 5 as yet. The second vaccine has been cleared for use and we don't need to hold any back. We can't say yet re deploying NPIs but it's likely to happen. The stay at home guidance is nearly ready to go with the new restriction of two people from two households. I am sceptical that there is any benefit in bringing this in before next week but we need to be ready to bring in the regulations at that time.

We have not yet seen the effect of Level 4 and schools being closed. Consideration will need to be given to whether schools can open at all after the break; the DFM will receive advice on this by Monday. It is highly likely that schools may close for longer and Level 4 also maintained for longer.

Between the 5th and 12th of January there will be some strategic choices that will need to be faced. Next week's Cabinet may decide some measures to tighten indoor gatherings, wakes for example. We need Ministerial decisions regarding this and the stay at home advice. NIMT have looked at the cases in Shetland and it is possible that it won't need to be moved to Level 4.

3. Review & Advice for FM

KT: I'd now like to hear discussion regarding the 4 Harms and will start with GS.

GS: I feel that we are now at the most dangerous point since mid-March. The escalating case numbers cannot be explained purely by people mixing. I expect that cases are going to get a lot worse and rapid growth is a huge concern.

I've had a meeting with the other CMOs and we discussed national health alert level 5 but it will stay at alert level 4 for now. It really is horrific in other parts of the UK. ICU patients are being airlifted to other parts of the country to get treatment. The rapid nature of the spread, despite restrictions, has surprised other nations. The R estimate in some parts of the UK is 1.8 and above and this will lead to more deaths. Scotland is deteriorating and today's NIMT was depressing. They are making changes to try and alleviate the pressures but it's difficult. Notably, Ayrshire and Arran are having difficulties. It's not just the small Health Boards. They have real problems and we are expecting further problems to come.

We need urgent action. I don't believe that the current Level 4 restrictions are sufficient to contain the new variant in Scotland.

KT: We are currently in Level 4 plus we have the schools closed as well.

GS: I am particularly struck by local intelligence regarding the source of infections. The workplace is an increasing source of reports along with the continuing problem of people flouting household gathering restrictions.

We need to learn from the experience of others, particularly Wales. It's not just the ability for infrastructure to cope, e.g. bed numbers, it's the ability to staff the wards as well. Staff availability is an increasing problem. We also have reduced beds due to distancing. Plus January is always a bad month, particularly the 4th of January. I expect the pressure to increase for the first two weeks in January compared to now.

KT: What do we know about transmission between young people?

JM: Infection rates are highest in working age and those over 80 years. There are lower rates in the 10 to 19 year old and 60 to 79 year old groups. We need to keep a