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# Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement - 22 June 2021

Published: **22 June 2021**From: [First Minister](#)Part of: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in Scotland](#), [Public safety and emergencies](#)Delivered by: **First Minister Nicola Sturgeon**Location: **Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh**

Statement given by the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon at the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, on Tuesday 22 June 2021.

**This document is part of a collection**

Presiding Officer.

Today's statement contains several important updates.

Firstly, as indicated last week, I can confirm that no part of the country will change level next week.

Apart from some minor amendments that I'll cover later, restrictions in all parts of the country, from Monday, will be unchanged.

I will also provide an update on vaccination milestones and set out indicative dates for the further lifting of restrictions, as we hope to move into and beyond level 0 and back to normality.

Firstly, though, today's statistics - and these demonstrate why caution is still required.

Yesterday, 2,167 positive cases were reported - a positivity rate of 9.1%

The total number of confirmed cases is now 257,742.

171 people are currently in hospital – 12 more than yesterday.

18 people are in intensive care, which is 3 more than yesterday.

And, sadly, 4 deaths were reported yesterday.

The total number of deaths under the daily definition, is now 7,696.

Once again, I send my condolences to those who have lost a loved one.

On vaccination, I can report that as of 7.30am, 3,664,571 people have received a first dose.

That is an increase of 17,134 since yesterday.

In addition, 15,783 people received a second dose yesterday, so the total number of second doses is now 2,602,753

The news on vaccination continues to be extremely positive but this has to be balanced against the continued rise in cases.

The number of new cases recorded over the past week has increased by almost 40% on the week before.

That total is seven times higher than in early May, and higher than at any point since late January.

This reflects the fact that the faster transmitting Delta variant is now dominant.

Obviously we cannot be complacent about this. However, we do have evidence that the link between new cases and serious health harm is weakening.

The number of people being admitted to hospital with Covid has fallen from around 10% of reported positive cases at the start of the year, to around 5% now.

And Covid patients, on average, are spending less time in hospital - though, we should remember that even if they don't need hospital treatment, some people will suffer significant health harms, including long Covid.

However, overall, the evidence that vaccination is helping protect people from serious health harms is allowing us to change how we respond to the virus.

Today's total of new positive tests is the largest we've seen since the peak in January. These numbers still shock.

The virus is still with us. But the vaccines are protecting more of us.

I will never regard any death from this virus as other than a human tragedy, and as cases rise, we can expect to see more deaths in coming weeks.

Back in January, however, we were seeing daily figures of more than 50 deaths. I expect, and I profoundly hope, that the link between cases, hospital admissions, and deaths will continue to weaken as more and more of us are fully vaccinated.

And so in making decisions about when we further lift restrictions, progress with vaccination is a significant factor.

Let me, therefore, set out the milestones we will reach in the coming weeks - assuming supplies are as expected.

By this Sunday, we will have vaccinated, with two doses, everyone in the top nine JCVI priority groups.

Of course, there might be some people who cannot attend an appointment this week and so get their second dose a bit later. There may also be some people – hopefully very few – who don't attend their scheduled appointment.

Those caveats apply to the other vaccination milestones I am about to set out.

But essentially, by the end of this week, we will have completed vaccination for priority groups 1 to 9.

These groups include everyone over the age of 50, all unpaid carers, and people with underlying health conditions, and they account for well over half of the adult population.

It is also estimated that prior to the vaccination programme, these groups accounted for 99% of all Covid deaths.

So the fact that virtually all of them will be fully vaccinated by the end of this week is hugely significant.

The next milestone will be 18 July. By then, all adults will have had the first dose. This is significantly ahead of schedule.

And then, by 26 July we expect to have given second doses to all 40 to 49-year-olds.

By 20 August, all 30 to 39-year-olds will have had a second dose.

And, finally, we expect to have completed second doses for all adults by 12 September.

We are also planning for possible future vaccination programmes. Depending on the advice we get from the JCVI, this could include booster jags in the autumn, and potential vaccination of 12 to 17-year-olds.

Vaccination offers us the route out of this pandemic.

We know that getting both doses provides good protection, including against the Delta variant.

So these milestones are important and they inform the decisions I will confirm today.

Also underpinning these decisions - and providing more context for them - are two papers we are publishing today.

The first is our revised strategic framework for tackling Covid.

Central to this is an updated strategic aim for our pandemic response.

Up until now, the Scottish Government's strategic intention has been to "suppress the virus to the lowest possible level and keep it there".

From now, our aim will be to "suppress the virus to a level consistent with alleviating its harms while we recover and rebuild for a better future".

This change reflects the fact that vaccination is reducing - we hope significantly - the harm that the virus causes.

Vaccination means it is now possible – indeed, necessary – to shift our strategic aim, and reduce the wider health, social and economic harms that strict 'lockdown' measures cause.

The second paper we are publishing today is our review of physical distancing.

Physical distancing has been an important mitigation against the virus but it is also burdensome for individuals and costly for businesses.

So as vaccinations bear more of the load of controlling the virus, we need to consider when and to what extent we can reduce the legal requirement for it.

Ultimately we hope to remove the legal requirement for physical distancing - even though we may for a period continue to advise people to think about safe distancing when interacting with people outside their close contact groups.

Let me turn now to the changes that we hope to make in the weeks ahead.

At the moment, the high number of new Covid cases being recorded is a significant consideration.

To use the race analogy, we must not allow the virus to get too far ahead of the vaccines.

Therefore, as indicated last week, we intend to maintain the current restrictions applicable in each part of Scotland for the next three weeks.

Within those levels, though, we will make some minor, but important, changes to the rules on weddings and funerals. These will take effect from Monday 28 June.

For example suppliers of wedding services, and other people employed by the couple getting married, will no longer count towards the cap on numbers at a wedding.

Those accompanying the wedding couple down the aisle will no longer need to wear face coverings.

Live entertainment at receptions will be possible - although people will still need to be seated at tables.

And we will change the guidance for funerals, so that people from more than one household can help carry a coffin, and take a cord when lowering it.

We expect these changes to have a relatively minor impact on transmission - they are relatively minor changes. But I hope they will make some difference to those organizing and attending weddings and funerals, ahead of the more substantial changes at level 0 next month.

With the exception of these changes, our assumption, based on recent case numbers, is that current levels will remain in force until 19 July, although obviously we continue to keep that under review.

Let me turn now to when we hope to lift remaining restrictions.

I want to be clear that what I am about to set out represents our best judgment at this stage of what is likely to strike a sensible balance. It is intended to give as much clarity as possible.

However, it is contingent on meeting our vaccination milestones and the revised strategic aim of alleviating the harms of the virus.

If the data in the coming weeks suggests we can go faster, we will.

Conversely, if the data says we need to slow down, we will do that too - though I very much hope that will not be necessary,

The next scheduled review point will be 19 July - though we will confirm the position a week in advance as usual.

By 19 July, three weeks will have elapsed since the completion of the vaccination programme for over 50s, which means that the vaccine will be giving everyone in that age group a significant level of protection.

Therefore, assuming we are meeting the revised strategic aim, we hope that all parts of Scotland, not currently in that level, can move to level 0 on 19 July.

That means, for example, that the limits for household gatherings indoors will increase from that date, and up to 200 people will be able to attend weddings and funerals.

We also hope - assuming the data supports this - that the general indoor physical distancing requirement can be reduced from 2 metres to 1 metre.

And we hope, from that date, to lift the outdoor requirement to physically distance.

In addition – in recognition of the reduced risk of outdoor transmission and therefore the desire to encourage people to stay outdoors as much as possible – we hope that limits on informal outdoor social gatherings, in private gardens for example, will also be removed at this stage.

So rather than the current rules for level 0 – which state that up to 15 people from 15 households can meet outdoors – informal social gatherings of any size will be allowed.

We will however keep in place temporarily the rules and processes currently applicable at level 0 for organised outdoor events, given that these can attract much larger crowds.

If we can move - as hoped - to level 0 on 19 July, that will be a significant step back to normality. But we have always been clear that level 0 cannot be an endpoint.

Some of the restrictions it entails are still significant – for example the household limit for indoor gatherings.

So we want to move beyond level 0 as quickly as it is prudent to do so. The updated strategic framework sets out what that means.

In short, while we are still likely to need some baseline measures, it means the lifting of the remaining major legal restrictions.

In reaching a view on when that can be done, we have considered the harm to health – and the strain on the NHS – that could be caused if Covid cases continue to rise.

And I must stress to parliament that, even with a reduced ratio of cases to hospitalisation, case numbers at the level being recorded just now, could still put significant pressure on the NHS. We must be mindful of that.

But we have also considered the wider harms that restrictions cause.

And we have considered how reasonable and proportionate it is to require people to comply with these restrictions as we meet vaccine milestones, and if evidence continues to show that vaccination is protecting more and more people from serious health impacts of Covid.

I mentioned earlier that we expect to have completed second doses for all over 40s by 26 July.

The protective effect of the second dose takes time to build up.

But within two weeks - by 9 August – we would expect the vast majority of over 40s to have a significant level of protection.

Of course, we need to remember that vaccination doesn't provide 100% protection and it won't be until later in September that all adults will have the protection of full vaccination.

However, our assessment - on balance and assuming we meet the necessary conditions on vaccination and harm reduction - is that it would be possible and proportionate to lift the major

remaining legal restrictions on 9 August.

We will consider and make a final assessment nearer the time of whether - as we hope - this could include the lifting of the legal requirement to physically distance indoors as well as outdoors.

The move beyond level 0 will be a major milestone and it will signal a return to almost complete normality in our day to day lives.

Of course, while this is a longed for moment, it is important to recognise that we still have a difficult path to navigate over the next few weeks to meet these milestones and even assuming we do, the pandemic will not be completely over at this stage.

As our Strategic Framework Update paper sets out, basic mitigations will still be required, as we move through summer and into the autumn, when we face the risk of a further resurgence in cases.

Measures such as rigorous and regular hand washing, cleaning surfaces and good ventilation will continue to be vital.

And even if we lift the legal requirement, as we hope to, we may still advise keeping a careful distance from people outside our close contact groups, especially if they are not fully vaccinated.

Also, at least for a period, we are likely to require continued wearing of face coverings in certain settings - for example, shops and public transport.

Test and Protect will also remain a vital part of our approach. Regular testing will still be advised and, while we are considering the impact of vaccination on self-isolation, isolation will continue to be necessary in certain circumstances, especially for those who test positive.

There will also be a need to manage outbreaks as and when they arise and the levels system will still be available to help us do that if necessary.

We all hope that we will not see a further variant, against which our vaccines are less effective; but we need to retain the ability to respond if that happens, both with updated vaccines and, if necessary, with other measures.

Also, we will not advise an immediate return to full office working on 9 August.

Instead we will continue to work with business to agree an appropriate phasing of this, beginning when we enter level 0, we hope on 19 July.

However, I think many would agree that, as a general principle, home-working should be more possible post Covid than it was before.

So, while recognising that a return to the workplace will be right for many, we will encourage continued support for home working where it is possible and appropriate.

This won't just assist with control of the virus, it will also help promote well-being more generally.

And while we will continue to keep the need for travel restrictions under review, it is likely that some targeted restrictions will be needed after 9 August as new variants continue to pose the biggest threat to our progress.

Finally, we will also work over the summer to plan for the return of schools, colleges and universities.

For the moment, though, I want to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone in education.

Most schools, and many early learning and childcare settings, are about to break for the summer holidays. Colleges and universities are also nearing the end of term.

For everyone working in education, this will have been the toughest – and most distressing – year of your professional career. I am grateful for everything you have done to keep nurseries and childcare facilities, schools, colleges and universities going in such difficult circumstances.

We will do all we can to minimise further Covid disruption in the next academic term.

Presiding officer

We must remember that this is a global pandemic. It will not be over here, until it is over across the world.

Unfortunately, the world is still some way from that.

However, in Scotland, while transmission is causing concern at the moment, vaccination is giving us much of the protection that only harsh restrictions have been able to give us so far.

That means we can now plan to move - much more firmly and with much greater confidence - from the need to control the virus through tough restrictions, to being able to live much more freely.

That is good news.

We must be careful still.

But from 19 July, and then more substantially from 9 August - assuming we are meeting our revised strategic aim of alleviating the harm of the virus - life should feel much less restricted for all of us.

A very significant degree of normality will be restored - for individuals and for businesses.

As I said earlier, these are indicative dates.

But they allow us to plan ahead with more clarity.



As always, we all have a part to play in keeping us on track, so I will end with a reminder of the key asks of everyone.

The first is vaccination. Please get vaccinated when invited to do so. And attend for both doses.

If you need to re-arrange or think you should have had an invitation by now, please go to the vaccinations section of the NHS Inform website.

If you had your first dose of the vaccine 8 weeks or more ago, check on the website to see if you can bring your second dose forward.

Second, please get tested regularly. Free lateral flow tests are available through NHS Inform. You can order them through the post, or collect them from local and regional test sites, and also now from community pharmacies.

If you test positive, please self-isolate and get the result confirmed through a PCR test.

And finally, please continue to stick to the rules where you live, and follow all the public health advice.

This is still really important. The virus is still out there and is spreading, so please continue to follow advice on physical distancing, hand-washing and face coverings.

Try to meet others outdoors as much as possible. No environment is entirely risk free but outdoors is much less risky than indoors.

If you are meeting indoors please stick to the limits and make sure the room is well ventilated.

That applies when watching the football too. We all know that tonight's game is absolutely massive - let me take the opportunity, I'm sure on behalf of all of us, to wish Steve Clarke and the team well. We will all be cheering Scotland on this evening. But please do it safely.

Presiding Officer

Six months ago when I confirmed to parliament that tough restrictions were being re-imposed, it was the day after the winter solstice - the shortest night of the year.

That was one of the darkest moments in the course of the pandemic.

For these past 15 months, we have endured restrictions that would have been considered impossible just two years ago.

The pain suffered and the people lost along the way must never be forgotten - they will never be forgotten.

And, in a global pandemic, we can't be certain that there won't difficult moments yet to come.

But I hope and believe that today's statement - just a day after the summer solstice - marks a positive turning point.

We are living in more hopeful times. We can now see a route to lifting restrictions and to enjoying again the simple but precious pleasures we have all missed so much.

The path ahead is not obstacle-free, but it is clearer than at any point so far.

Thanks to vaccines, normal life is now much closer, it is within sight. So let's stick with it and do what is required to get us there.

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- ☐ Yes, but

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