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Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's speech 2 November

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Statement given by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon at a media briefing in St Andrew's House on Monday 2 November 2020.

**This document is part of a collection**

Coronavirus update from the First Minister: 2 November 2020



Thanks for joining us again today.

I will start with the usual update on today's statistics.

The total number of positive cases reported yesterday was 951.

That represents 9.6% of the total number of tests, and takes the total number of confirmed cases in Scotland now to 66,012.

385 of the new cases were in Greater Glasgow and Clyde, 268 in Lanarkshire, 76 in Ayrshire and Arran and 69 in Lothian.

The remaining cases were spread across the seven other mainland health board areas.

I can also confirm that 1,225 people are currently in hospital – that is an increase of 32 from yesterday. And 93 people are in intensive care, which is 12 more than yesterday.

And finally, no deaths have been registered in the past 24 hours of patients who first tested positive over the previous 28 days.

However, as you will recall registration offices are largely closed on Sundays, and so that should be treated with some caution. I would, sadly, expect that number to rise again tomorrow.

And, of course, since the last briefing on Friday, 30 additional deaths have been registered.

Which means that the total number of deaths, under the daily measurement is now 2,849.

That total reminds us of the impact the virus has, and continues to have. I want once again to pass on my condolences to all those who have lost loved ones.

I am joined today by the Health Secretary, and the Chief Medical Officer.

In a few moments, the Health Secretary will talk about care homes and also confirm some additional funding for community-based mental health services for young people.

I have two issues I want to briefly cover today.

In a moment, I am going to reflect a little bit on implications for Scotland of the UK Government's announcement on Saturday of significant new restrictions for England from later this week.

Before that, I want to remind everyone that in Scotland, the new system of levels came into force at 6 AM this morning.

For most people in most parts of Scotland, that does not lead to any immediate or major changes in the rules that were already in place.

However there are two points in particular that I think it is worth me noting right now.

Highland, Moray, Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles are now in level one - that reflects the lower prevalence of the virus in these areas.

However for the moment, it continues to be the case that people in those areas – as is the case in all parts of the country – should not meet up in each other's homes.

So that remains the rule across the whole country - and that is an important precaution that is still in place at this time while the virus remains a significant threat.

The other significant change relates to people in Dundee, which today becomes a level three area. Most parts of the central belt are also in level three.

That means tighter restrictions apply, including for hospitality premises.

And it also means for people in Dundee – as for all level three areas - we are asking that you do not travel outside your local authority area, unless you have an essential reason for doing so.

Full detail of the rules that apply for each level are available on the Scottish Government's website.

And from today, the website now also has a postcode checker.

So you can enter your postcode and see the rules that are applicable in your area.

That means if you are in any doubt at all about the do's and don'ts, please check on that postcode checker. I hope it will be helpful in enabling everyone to understand and to follow the new system.

It is vital that everyone sticks to the rules, that has always been the case, but at this juncture I really cannot stress that enough.

Please don't try to put your own twist on the rules, or look for loopholes in them.

It is really important right now that all of us try to keep within the spirit of these rules and remember what they are designed to do: drive down levels of the virus. Please remember that and act within the rules to reduce your social interactions as much as possible

The second issue I want to touch on is the UK Government's announcement on Saturday, of new measures coming into force in England from Thursday.

I have just come from a COBR meeting chaired by Michael Gove, and attended by representatives of the other devolved administrations.

The Scottish Government is as you would expect considering carefully any implications for Scotland of the announcements for England. And there is one issue I want to air with you today.

As you know, I have tried throughout the pandemic to be as open as possible about the difficult choices we face - and the factors we have to weigh up in making those difficult choices.

So today, it is important to set out the kind of decision we face over the coming days.

Today, as I have mentioned the new level system takes effect. And for many this sees the continuation of tough restrictions.

When Covid cases started to surge again, we acted quickly - though we have been clear all along that our room for manoeuvre is limited by our lack of financial levers. Without borrowing powers of our own in the Scottish Government, we have to rely on the UK Government's financial interventions. That is true of the other devolved administrations too.

Notwithstanding that, in September we took the tough decision to restrict meetings in our own homes.

And in early October, we put restrictions on hospitality.

Now, we think we can see some encouraging signs that these restrictions are having an impact.

The rate of increase in cases has been slowing down. I think you can see that in the numbers I am reporting every day.

However- and it is important to be equally clear about this - the impact is at this stage still quite gradual.

And we can't yet be sure that it will be sustained or it will go as far as we need it to go. The position, as it is in so many countries across the world, remains very fragile. Obviously we remain concerned about the rise in hospital and intensive care admissions.

So, it would be wrong to say we have no concerns about the next few weeks. Clearly that would not be correct. We still face a lot of uncertainty as all countries to.

That is why I made clear last week, when I set out the levels that would apply initially, that we might yet have to go further - and that we can't rule out, and should not rule out, a move to level four for all or parts of the country.

And while that decision would never be easy, there is no doubt that the availability of a more extensive furlough scheme of the kind the Prime Minister announced on Saturday, would make it slightly less difficult - because workers would have more of their wages paid.

So the decision we have to weigh up in coming days is this one -

Should we take opportunity of more generous financial support to step harder on the brakes now to try to drive infection rates down faster and more firmly.

The potential benefit of that would be suppressing the virus further and faster at a time when financial support is available. And possibly, I don't want to overstate this, possibly opening up a bit more breathing space over the Christmas period.

Ideally, we would assess the impact of the current restrictions for a bit longer before making that decision - and at the very least wait until our next scheduled review point next which is due next Tuesday, a week tomorrow.

But here is the dilemma we face, and it is important I am open with you about it.

At this stage the indication is that the more generous furlough scheme is only going to be available for the next month, during the period of England's lockdown.

Now we continue to press the case that it should be available to devolved administrations whenever it is needed. And I think most reasonable people would think that is the fair position. I, with colleagues in the Welsh and Northern Irish governments have pressed that point very firmly at the COBR meeting which has just concluded.

But we can't put off vital decisions while we have a debate with the Treasury because the virus doesn't stop spreading while we do that.

That is why I hope we get absolute clarity on that point from the Treasury today. Because it matters to our decision making here in Scotland.

If we know furlough is available without limit of time we might still ultimately have to act, but we could give ourselves a bit more time to assess the situation.

So not take decisions too quickly that would involve more restrictions on people before we have had the opportunity to assess the current situation.

However if the furlough extension remains time limited we will face having to take that decision more quickly. Because we will be faced with the risk of not acting now meaning that we will have

to act later, but at a time when the financial support is not available.

COVID, in my view, is complicated enough and dealing with it is hard enough without these unnecessary additional complications.

I am hopeful we will get some clarity from the Treasury later on – that doesn't mean we suddenly escape tough decisions, but that would mean we can continue to take those decisions in a proper, measured, timely way in Scotland taking account of our own data.

So I wanted to air that with you today. That is the decision we face and the situation we face over the next few days.

I intend to speak to other party leaders later today. Of course I will keep Parliament updated over the course of the week and I will update all of you over the course of the week as well.

Those are the issues I wanted to update on today. To close, let me remind everybody of the rules and guidelines that are in place now. As I said earlier on, it is so vital right now that all of us comply with these rules to the maximum.

If you live in a level three area – that is most parts of the central belt, including Dundee - you should not travel outside your own local authority area unless it is essential, for work that can't be done at home for example, or for caring responsibilities.

And people in other parts of Scotland should not travel into level three areas except for same essential purposes.

And please, we are also asking people not to travel outside of Scotland unless it is essential to do so.

Abiding by travel restrictions is essential if a regional approach is to be sustainable now and into the future. We must guard against taking the virus from high prevalence areas to low prevalence areas.

Secondly, none of us – anywhere in Scotland – should be visiting each other's homes right now, again except for very specific purposes – childcare, or caring for an older or vulnerable person.

When we do meet people from other households - outdoors, or in indoor public places - the maximum group size is six, from a maximum of two households.

Please avoid car-sharing unless it is essential.

Work from home if you can.

Remember to download the Protect Scotland app, if you haven't already done so.

And finally, remember the five key rules that help keep us all safe wherever we are.

- wear face coverings

- avoid places with crowds of people
- clean your hands regularly and remember to clean hard surfaces
- keep two metres distance from people from other households
- and self-isolate, and get tested immediately, if you have the symptoms of COVID

These rules are about protecting ourselves, they are about protecting those we love, our wider communities. They are also about protecting the NHS and ultimately saving lives.

So my thanks to everybody for your compliance. Please, please stick with it.

Was this helpful?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, but

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