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MEMORANDUM E (21) 138 (C)

**FROM: ROBIN SWANN MLA
MINISTER FOR HEALTH**

DATE: 17 JUNE 2021

TO: EXECUTIVE COLLEAGUES

**FINAL EXECUTIVE PAPER: RATIFICATION OF DECISION FOR FURTHER
EASEMENTS FROM 21 JUNE**

1. At the Executive meeting on 13 May 2021, a package of relaxations to the existing Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 ("the 2021 Regulations") were agreed. A large number of these have since been implemented, including the wide range of hospitality relaxations of 24 May. Additionally a number of easements initially proposed at that date are due to come into effect on 21 June, subject to ratification on 17 June.
2. Similarly at the Executive meeting on 10 June 2021, additional relaxations to the existing Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 ("the 2021 Regulations") were agreed. A number of these are due to come into effect on Monday 21 June and Thursday 1 July respectively, again subject to Executive ratification on 17 June.
3. The proposals, which were brought by The Executive Office and Cross Departmental Working Group as part of the Pathway out of Restrictions process, relate to indoor & outdoor gatherings, households & bubbles, close contact services, licenced & unlicensed premises, live music and dancing. The full proposals are included at **ANNEX A**.
4. Should those proposals be agreed by the amendment, I additionally propose a technical amendment to update the provisions in relation to gatherings. Whilst this

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has not previously come before the Executive, I believe it is necessary in order to align the requirements and ensure they apply to everyone fairly.

5. The current regulations stipulate a number of exemptions for indoor and outdoor gatherings. These date back to the time when tighter restrictions were in place around the ability to hold a gathering, and include such things as funerals, marriages, workplace gatherings, education etc. These exemptions at present require a risk assessment to be carried out regardless of numbers, i.e. for 15 or less people at an indoor gathering, or 30 or less at an outdoor gatherings. However, as the regulations currently provide for greater numbers to gather, such provisions are now redundant and in fact create a situation of disparity across the regulations. In all other circumstances risk assessments only apply when the thresholds above are met. I therefore propose that they are removed to accurately reflect the new position. A list of the current exemptions as stands is included at **ANNEX B**.
6. The Executive previously agreed that the decision to ratify its previous decisions would be based on the data and overall picture of the pandemic at the time of ratification. I refer colleagues to this week's R Paper which gives an overall state of the pandemic, as well as the advice of CMO/CSA below.

CMO/CSA Advice

7. The R paper for this week summarises the current state of the epidemic in NI, and highlights the rapid increase in cases in other parts of the CTA as a result of the spread of delta variant.
8. At present, R_t is around 1.2 in NI and increasing, as a result of relaxations of 24th May. Delta variant comprises around 30% of cases and based on experience elsewhere in the UK this % is likely to increase rapidly along with a further increase in R_t . Modelling which assumes delta variant becoming dominant in early July indicates the potential for a significant wave of COVID cases in late summer / early autumn. Early additional relaxations are likely to accelerate this process and increase the peak of any wave.

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9. There is uncertainty about the extent to which hospital pressures will increase as COVID cases rise. However, early experience in Scotland and the NW of England clearly indicates that some increase in admissions will follow a rise in cases and this must be considered in the context of considerable hospital pressures as a result in “catch up” activity.
10. Two doses of currently approved vaccines appear highly effective against delta variant, and in particular against more severe disease. Progress in the vaccination programme is therefore critical in minimising the impact of delta variant spread.
11. For these reasons CMO / CSA advice is that there would be significant benefit from a health perspective in delaying further relaxations at present, as has been proposed in other parts of the CTA. This would allow a larger proportion of the population to be vaccinated before additional mixing occurs and would reduce the size of any third wave.
12. Modelling suggests that the optimum period of delay would be 3-4 weeks. However, given the earlier closure of schools in NI compared with other parts of the UK it would be reasonable to review the position again at the beginning of July.

RECOMMENDATION

13. It is recommended that Executive do not ratify the proposed relaxations as of 21 June and 1 July, but instead review the position again at the beginning of July.

ROBIN SWANN MLA
MINISTER FOR HEALTH

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ANNEX A – PROPOSALS FOR RELAXATION

1. Proposal for Relaxation on 21 June

1.1 Proposals agreed by the Executive on 13 May

Culture, Heritage and Entertainment
Theatres, Concert Halls etc
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Remove the restriction on audiences in seated theatres and concert halls and other such venuesEntry 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
Work
Exhibitions/Conferences etc
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Return of conferences and exhibitions

1.2 Proposals agreed by the Executive on 10 June

Home and Community
Visits in Indoor in Domestic Settings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Permit ten people from no more than two households.If one household has ten members, the maximum is increased to 15 from no more than two householdsDoes not include children 12 and under.
Visits to Outdoor in Domestic Settings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Permit 15 people from an unlimited number of households.Does not include children 12 and under

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Linked Household/Bubble
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove the linked households/bubble provision.
Retail and Services
Close Contact Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Able to open without appointments• Other mitigations must remain
Cross Sectoral – Live Music
In licenced and unlicensed premises
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permit live music at background or ambient levels• The volume must be such to enable visitors to conduct conversation at normal loudness of speech.• Exemptions apply that permit live music without restriction to background or ambient levels for “other indoor venues” which can include e.g. in a function room or conference suite within a hotel. However access to the “venue” must be controlled and managed and the venue must be sufficiently isolated from the rest of the premises to ensure that the volume of the music does not breach ambient or background level in other parts of the premises. Must comply with the requirements under the section “Other Indoor Venues” below including ticketing, seating and dancing restrictions.• Social distancing of 1m required
At Outdoor Events
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permit live music and dancing• No restriction to background or ambient levels.
In Concert Venues, Theatres and Other Indoor Venues
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permit live music for rehearsals and performances• No restriction to background or ambient levels of volume• Entry to performances for audiences will be by ticket only. Tickets must be purchased in advance of the performance.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audiences for indoor events must have allocated seating and remain seated (unless using facilities) and are not permitted to dance• Social distancing of 1m required
“Other” Indoor Venues
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permits indoor live music• No restriction to background or ambient levels of volume• Can include a space within larger premises – for example a function room or conference suite within a hotel• In such circumstances, access to the venue must be effectively controlled and managed and the venue must be sufficiently isolated from the rest of the premises to ensure that the volume of the music in the venue does not breach ambient or background levels in other parts of the premises.• No dancing for audience.• 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
Outdoor Gatherings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removes upper limit of 500• Permit to maximum allowed per risk assessment for relevant venue• If over 30 people, risk assessment required

2. Proposal for Relaxation on 1 July

Agreed by the Executive on 10 June

Education & Young People
Youth Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A restart of overnight residential stays for youth services• Includes indoor and outdoor activities• Uniformed organisations are permitted to take part in these activities

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- Part of the continued phased reopening of youth services to facilitate delivery of the summer youth programme

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ANNEX B – CURRENT EXEMPTIONS TO INDOOR AND OUTDOOR GATHERINGS

The regulations provide the following exemptions to indoor and outdoor gatherings:

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

Regulation 9(4):

Paragraph (3) does not apply to a gathering which fulfils the conditions in paragraph (5) and which is one of the following—

- (a) a funeral, a service associated with a funeral or an act of worship or belief, in a place of worship, a place where beliefs are practised or a place where funerals take place;
- (b) a marriage ceremony or civil partnership ceremony in a place of worship or a place where beliefs are practised or any other place where those ceremonies may lawfully take place;
- (c) an educational activity in a school or institute of higher or further education;
- (d) an educational activity not in a school or institute of higher or further education where it is essential that the activity takes place face to face;
- (e) a gathering in a workplace, when it is not reasonably practicable for the duties of a person participating in the gathering to be carried out at that person's private dwelling;
- (f) a blood donation session or a vaccination session;
- (g) a visit to a place where a marriage ceremony or civil partnership ceremony may lawfully take place, for the purposes of viewing the facilities, provided that the gathering includes no more than four visitors and one member of staff of the place and that there is no more than one such visit at any one time.
- (h) a close contact service (but not a close contact service to which regulation 16(3) relates);
- (i) a test of competence to drive established by Article 5 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981(4);
- (j);
- (k) childcare provided by a person registered under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 or childcare provided free of charge or for less than two hours per day;
- (l) the gathering is for the purposes of picketing which is carried out in accordance with part VIII of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

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