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Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement - 18 June 2021

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Statement given by the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon at St Andrew's House, Edinburgh on Friday 18 June 2021.

**This document is part of a collection**

Thanks very much for joining us today.

As you can see, Jason is with me and he'll help me with questions from the media later on.

But first of all let me just give you an update on the situation starting with today's figures. Nine hundred and fifty positive cases were reported yesterday. That's 3.5 per cent of the tests that were carried out yesterday and the total number of confirmed cases now stands at 251,911.

There are 128 people currently in hospital. That's 12 fewer than the position yesterday.

And 12 people are receiving intensive care just now and that's no change on the position yesterday.

Sadly, two additional deaths have been reported and that means the total number of deaths is now 7,690. That's the total number under this daily measurement that we report against.

And as always, my condolences are with everyone who has lost someone.

I'll also give you an update on the vaccination programme.

As of this morning, 3,591,638 people have received a first dose of the vaccine.

That's an increase of 19,912 since yesterday.

In addition to that, 19,737 people got a second dose yesterday and that brings the total number of second doses that have been administered now to 2,535,803.

So as you can see, the vaccination programme continues to go extremely well.

More than three quarters of all over 40 – people over the age of 40 have now received both doses of the vaccine.

And that figure includes some quite exceptional coverage rates amongst older age groups, who of course at an earlier stage were prioritised for vaccination. So for example more than 97 per cent of everybody over the age of 60 has now received both doses of the vaccine.

As I indicated in Parliament earlier this week, all second dose appointments will now be scheduled for eight weeks after someone's first vaccination, rather than 12 weeks as before.

That's a really important step forward because second doses we know, and all of the developing evidence tells us this, are really important in providing significant protection against the virus and in particular, against the current Delta strain that is circulating so widely.

As well as accelerating the provision of second doses though, we are also making really rapid progress on first doses for younger age groups.

Already, I can tell you that more than 70 per cent of 30 to 39 year olds, and also one third of 18 to 29 year olds, have received a first dose of the vaccine.

And I can confirm today, again I indicated that we hoped this would be the case earlier in the week, but I can confirm that the scheduling of appointments for first doses for all 18 to 29 year olds is now complete.

So everyone in that age group, if you haven't already, will have received notification of an appointment by the end of next week.

If you are aged 18 to 29 and you haven't had an appointment sent to you by next weekend, please go to the appointment checker page on the NHS Inform website so that you can make sure that you get an appointment arranged.

And you can also use the NHS Inform website if you need to rearrange your appointment and please do rearrange, this is a message I want to stress today, please do rearrange if you're not able to make the appointment sent to you.

We understand that particularly in the younger age groups, people are working, so there may be more who just can't make the first appointment that is sent to them. Don't let that mean that you don't get vaccinated. Please go onto the website and make an alternative appointment.

Vaccines are the way back to normality. I think we are increasingly confident of that and literally, quite literally, every single one of us who gets these jags is representing a step back towards normal life.

Now we had indicated, and we have indicated all along up until now that we expected to have offered first doses to all adults by the end of July. Now I've just said that all appointments for all adults should be with people by the end of next week, so you can see that the programme is going faster than we previously anticipated.

And I'm also pleased to confirm that we now expect to have completed first doses for all adults by 18 July. So again, faster progress than we thought might be possible just even a few weeks ago.

And I want to convey my thanks to everyone working hard to make that possible.

Of course, everyone is working just as hard to get second doses administered as quickly as possible.

And again let me stress, getting two doses gives substantially more protection than just one dose. So please come forward to get your second dose just as soon as you are called.

I'm personally looking forward to getting my own second dose on Monday morning next week.

It is this progress with vaccination that gives us real hope and really significant hope that despite the big increase in cases we've been seeing recently driven by the Delta variant, we will still be able, albeit we've had to pause a bit at the moment, but that we will still be able over the course of the summer to ease restrictions further and get back to much greater normality.

As I've discussed before, vaccinations do now seem to be weakening the link between a rise in new cases, and a rise in hospitalisations and people dying from the virus. Public Health Scotland published some information this week showing that in February about 13 per cent of all positive cases ended up in hospital. By the time we got to the end of May, that was down to 5 per cent so we can see the effect and the impact that vaccines are having.

The link has weakened. It hasn't yet completely broken because there is still a sizeable proportion of the population not yet fully vaccinated which is why, as I indicated to Parliament on Tuesday, we are taking at the moment a bit of a pause in our route map. It is unlikely, although I'll confirm this in Parliament next Tuesday, but it's unlikely that we will move any part of the country down a level at the next review point.

It's really important in this race we're in between the virus and the vaccine that we do the vaccination as quickly as possible but that we don't allow the virus to get ahead of it. And at points that must mean taking action to slow the virus down as much as we can.

So as I said, I'll give a further update to Parliament on Tuesday and at that time we'll also publish a revised Strategic Framework which will set out our aims for moving beyond level 0 as soon as we can and returning towards normality just as soon as possible.

For today though before I finish there are three points I want to briefly highlight.

Firstly, just to give an indication that we are introducing to Parliament today legislation that will extend by six months some of the emergency measures we had to introduce because of the pandemic. These measures include changes to how the courts operate and additional safeguards to protect tenants from eviction.

However, we are also allowing some of the emergency regulations to expire, for example some temporary measures on marriages and civil partnerships are no longer needed now that registration offices are open again.

The legislation therefore recognises that although we are in that journey back to normality and therefore some measures are no longer needed, we're not quite there yet. So we need to keep some of these in place for a bit longer.

The second point I want to highlight is around travel. As you know, we continue to keep travel restrictions under review and I can confirm some changes that will come into effect over the weekend.

From today, current restrictions on travel between Scotland and Bedford will be lifted. So non-essential travel to and from Bedford is permitted again.

We have also now lifted restrictions on travel between Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. Again, that means that non-essential travel is no longer prohibited however anyone planning to travel to the Republic of Ireland should note that under Ireland's current rules, you will be required to self-isolate when you arrive in there.

I regret however that we are introducing restrictions on travel between Scotland and two cities in England.

Manchester and Salford currently have high levels of Covid, and so from Monday onwards, non-essential travel between Scotland and those cities is not permitted.

Non-essential travel is already prohibited between Scotland and Bolton, and Blackburn with Darwen.

So anyone travelling elsewhere in the Greater Manchester or Lancashire area, I'd ask to think carefully about whether your journey is really necessary because we do see cases rising across the region.

Now I realise that for those with family or friends in Manchester or Salford, or for anyone who was simply planning a visit, this is disappointing.

But rates of Covid in these cities are particularly high at the moment and these restrictions are intended to minimise the risk of either exacerbating the situation there or indeed allowing more virus to come back here to Scotland.

The third point I want to highlight is about the main talking point for most people over the course of today, I would imagine, which is the football later this evening.

The Scotland-England game at Wembley tonight will be a great occasion, or at least we hope it will be a great occasion.

And let me just take this opportunity to wish Steve Clark, Andy Robertson and the whole of the Scotland team the very, very best of luck for that match tonight. The whole country will be cheering you on.

It's only natural that many of us want to watch this game with friends. You know, that sense of being in a shared experience is one of the many things that make watching our national team so special.

But please, and you know I don't relish being the one that has to keep saying this but I have a duty to keep saying this, please remember when you are watching the match tonight, continue to take care.

In particular, if you're gathering inside your own house or somebody else's house, please stick to the limits. And that at the moment is six people from three households. And the point of these limits is to try to restrict spread of the virus because indoors we know is much higher risk than outdoors.

And please, remember to take the basic precautions. Keep the windows open. Wash your hands regularly.

And please be especially careful around people who aren't yet fully vaccinated or who might be more vulnerable and even be careful if, or hopefully when, Scotland score some goals.

I know these precautions are tiresome for everybody in every context and they're particularly tiresome when people are trying to enjoy the normal pleasures of a football match.

But this virus, it doesn't care about football. It's not a Scotland fan or an England fan. It only cares about spreading from one person to another so all of us still have to work hard to try to deny it, as far as we can, the opportunities to spread.

And that basic message that we all still need to take care continues to be really important.

As I said a moment ago, this is a race between vaccines that are getting us out of this, and the virus. Unfortunately this is a virus that keeps learning to run faster so we have an obligation and a need to continue to slow it down while that vaccination programme continues to power ahead.

So I'll end just by briefly stressing the key three – the three key things that if we all do, we're going to really help achieve that.

The first is vaccination. I cannot stress enough how important it is to get vaccinated when you have the chance. Not just your first dose but your second dose as well. Every single one of us that rolls up our sleeve, gets these jags, is personally playing a part in getting us back to normal.

The vaccines are working well. We know that. Our big vulnerability will always be if we have large numbers of people who are not vaccinated. So we're getting through the population as quickly as possible but what all of us as individual citizens need to do is make sure we come forward for our appointment. We owe that to ourselves but we owe it to each other too. So let's all do our civic duty and get vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Secondly, test yourself regularly. Lateral flow devices, you can order them through NHS Inform, you can get them from local community pharmacies now or some of the pop-in testing centres, the local testing centres that are available. But if we all test ourselves regularly we can pick up more cases and do more to break those chains of transmission.

And finally, please stick to the rules wherever you live, and keep following the basic hygiene measures.

Stay outdoors as much as possible particularly when the weather is as nice as it has been in Scotland for the last couple of weeks.

But if you are meeting people indoors, take extra care. Stick to the limits and follow all of the advice around hygiene and ventilation.

And just remember physical distancing, hand-washing, face coverings. All of these things are as important now as ever, and more important as we are doing more and more normal things.

So let's keep doing all of these things and notwithstanding the case numbers that we're seeing right now, we do have every reason because of the vaccination to feel much more optimistic and positive about the weeks and the months that lie ahead.

So thank you for bearing with me through that and listening. We'll move straight to questions now.

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- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, but

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