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Subject: Coronavirus press conference with First Minister, Mark Drakeford.

Attachments: FM press conference script Sept 17.docx

Hi all,

Here's a summary of today's Coronavirus press conference with First Minister, Mark Drakeford. His script is also attached.

Questions

Q: I'm at the Philharmonic, actually in Cardiff, and part of the reason for being here is to talk to Nick Newman, who's the group General Manager and he's asked me to ask you more about on what basis have you made this decision and the reason he's asked that is because they as an industry as a night time hospitality industry feel that they have taken a lot of steps to be as safe as possible, and they are concerned that this decision sends out the message that they are not as safe as other sectors and other industries. What can you say to Nick and his colleagues?

A: Well first thing I would say is to recognise all the hard work that has gone on in that sector the steps that have already been taken. But next steps are unavoidably high risk settings compared to other places, by their nature people go to a nightclub, to get close to other people. They are often

places which again by their nature, aren't ventilated, in a way that other settings are able to be. It is why in the gradual reopening of Wales as we moved down the alert levels during the spring, nightclubs were the very last places in Wales to be reopened. Despite the real efforts that the sector makes, it cannot be argued that nightclubs are not inherently and intrinsically higher risk venues than other places. Now many such places already use the COVID pass, which is why we have decided having listened carefully to what people said to move to that at this point, rather than vaccine certification as one further measure. COVID passes already being on the list of reasonable measures that such venues can take, to make them mandatory from the 11th of October just makes them that bit safer, again, and increases the chances that we'll be able to keep them open during the autumn and the winter.

Q: Can I ask you a question about, I suppose the politics or the principles of this, you use the term COVID passes but isn't it a vaccine passport by another name. And isn't there or are you alert to the civil liberties risk that this could be the beginning of compulsory ID cards?

A: Well, your first part of that question, is that they are clearly not vaccine passports because you can get a COVID pass without being vaccinated. So it does avoid all those difficult ethical issues about people who cannot be vaccinated, those people can get a COVID pass because they can get through one through the testing regime. On your second point, I'm always myself acutely aware, and the cabinet is always acutely aware of the civil liberties implications of everything we do. Nobody wants to intrude on people's liberties, other than to the proportionate extent necessary to prevent other restrictions on people's lives, you know, just think of the slide that we started with today. Those people who every day are falling so ill that they need to be admitted to hospital. Those rising numbers of people who are dying from Coronavirus in Wales. Those people have freedoms as well. And part of their freedom is to live in a society where collectively, we take those reasonable measures to keep one another safe. That's what we are balancing all the time, and the balance that we've struck today reflects our concerns for the liberties of individuals in that civil liberties sense, but also those wider liberties to go about our lives free from the risks of this awful disease.

Q: When did you decide that you perhaps wouldn't stomach a full blown vaccine passport, and why wait to introduce the pass, until the middle of October, when your own modelling suggests the cases will be in decline by then?

A: So, the cabinet has met on four separate occasions over the last week to think through all the many considerations that we've already touched on today. These are difficult to closely balanced decisions, and it was right that we took the time we needed to think through every aspect of it the final decision was made yesterday afternoon, when we had final advice on a number of the issues that lie behind today's decisions. The reason for not implementing on a compulsory basis the COVID Pass in high risk areas until the 11th of October, is to give the sector time to prepare. Whenever we change the rules in the whole history of Coronavirus we've always had appeals from sectors to give them the time they need to make the necessary preparation. Many high risk venues already use the COVID Pass. As I've explained I think there's an event today where COVID classes will be being used by the Royal Welsh show in order to get access to that event. So people can use it now, people can use it in advance of the 11th of October, but to give people proper opportunity to put everything properly in place, we will give three weeks for those preparations to be carried out.

Q: Can I ask you about the pressure on the NHS at the moment. You outlined where some of that lies and people working in the system are telling us at the moment about the unprecedented levels of pressure they're facing. Will you now ask the military to help to reduce ambulance response times as is happening in Scotland, and do you accept that more elective treatments will be postponed. And those record waiting times that we hear every month are going to get longer as the autumn and winter kicks in?

A: Well, it's absolutely true that the health services is under huge current pressure, And it's under pressure from all sorts of reasons and sources Coronavirus with numbers that you saw earlier, with

running the vaccination campaigns, we're dealing with the flu programme that we'll be asking them to carry out over the autumn, with a very high number of people who are presenting as emergency cases, direct to hospital said earlier, and last week there are things we can all do ourselves to think about that and to try to help. And of course, by the enormous effort to restore that non Coronavirus treatments that were affected earlier in the pandemic. We've had very regular, and very significant help from the Armed Forces during the pandemic, and if we need to ask for further help from them, then the path to do that is well understood, and those lines of communication are always open. In some parts of Wales, Health Boards have already had to pull back from some planned surgery in order to balance all the other vendors they're being asked to do, but that is a temporary measure when they do so, and they are anxious always to get back to trying to provide those more regular and routine treatments, as soon as conditions allow. But it's going to be a difficult and continuing balancing act right through the winter.

Q: In France where you need to be jabbed to go for meals our cinema there was a huge vaccination, after the rules came in, you've told us the 30% of 18 to 39 year olds have yet to be fully vaccinated, or how will the COVID pass that allows you to simply use a lateral test encourage them to get jabbed. And if it isn't about encouraging people to get a job. How much do you expect lateral flow test to reduce the spread of COVID?

A: It's not primarily a measure to improve vaccination by hoping we'll have that effect as well it is primarily a public health defence, measure the position in France and Wales are not comparable. I don't believe because our levels of vaccination are so much higher than they were in France when those measures were introduced, and while there is still a way to go in getting enough people in those earlier age groups to come forward, those figures are going up every day. Now, if the COVID Pass regime was made more people by quickest and easiest way to get the pass. You don't have to worry about lateral flow test every time you want to go somewhere to get vaccinated, all well and good. I absolutely encourage people to do that because when you've got your vaccines. The past is gone and there's nothing else that you will need to do so. If it does persuade more people to come forward, then that will be a very good thing. If people choose not to or have been able to, then they will be able to use the testing regime. In its place, people I think are very used to lateral flow devices, they're used extensively in our schools regime in our care home regime, and many of us will have used them in our own lives as well we need to be able to make sure that we are safe from the virus and the reliance on it is the second line of defence in the COVID Pass vaccination is the first line, I think, is one that you know we can make work effectively in Wales

Q: Are you concerned about people simply cheating these tests?

A: It doesn't mean a massive a lot of your bureaucracy for businesses as we said you know many businesses operated every day now, and we're able to accommodate it very successfully and there's one of the reasons we chose the COVID pass at this point is because the systems are already there, freely available to businesses at a no charge to them. Am I concerned that they may be misuse of lateral flow test well of course we are right to be concerned about that. But I rely on the fact that the long history of Coronavirus in Wales. The vast majority of people are people who want to have, who want to do the right thing, who want to be sure that they are playing their part in keeping themselves safe, and other people safe too. We will consider. Over the next few days, whether or not to introduce a specific offence, or of knowingly and deliberately falsifying COVID pass. So if there are people think that this is just an easy run, they can just invent results that they may find there are significant consequences for them in doing so.

Q: So would that be the same as if you'd give false information to track and trace?

A: I certainly have forgotten and even you may have forgotten a bit, but if you need to show an ID pass to go into a pub, to show that you're 18. It's an offence to falsify the evidence that you provide to

do so. So there are parallel regimes that we can draw on. If we decided that the risk of people falsifying it is so significant that we need to have a specific regime for it.

A: Lydia asking me whether, and why we are not going to make the COVID Pass compulsory for people under the age of 18, and whether we are keeping that under review, I answered by saying we do keep it under review we keep everything under review. Its how we've changed the rules in Wales at the end of this three weeks, and we will be thinking over the coming weeks of whether there are any other measures of the same sort, those low cost measures as sage refers to them, we can take now that will help us to keep Wales open to keep Wales safe over the winter and autumn that is ahead with younger people, they haven't been able to access vaccination, as others over the same period of time. There are other arguments as to why they should be excluded from it. We'll keep all of that, under review as well.

Q: So Lydia just asking me about the compulsory use of face coverings, in those settings we've identified in Wales. What we are going to do to reinforce that message, and are we doing it because we are worried that you know more people are not observing the law in Wales. So on a final point I just explained that the evidence that we have from enforcement authorities, and we do collect that information from them every week, is that the considerable majority of people in Wales, continue to follow the law. Every week we do research into people's own attitudes on a whole range of things to do with Coronavirus, we always ask the question. Are you wearing a mask yourself on public transport, when you're out shopping. And the answer comes back from the considerable majority of people, yes I do, and I expect other people to do the same. So when you're out and about yourself, you do see examples of people not following the rules. It is against the background of a significant majority of people still doing it, and expecting others. So what we will do is we will ask people who run our trains, our buses, our supermarkets to reinforce that message, making sure if you're on the train for example you're coming into Wales, there's an announcement on the tannoy that tells you you're in Wales, wearing a face covering on public transport is compulsory here. We want to talk to our supermarket colleagues, can we do more, more announcements over the tannoy to remind people if you're shopping here, you've got to wear a mask. Could we have more signs at the front entrance of supermarkets more prominently, reminding people if you're coming in here, you've got to wear a mask before you do so, so part of our effort is about just making sure people know the message, and then we will work with our enforcement colleagues in local authorities in particular, to see what more can be done, where there are instances where the law in Wales is not being observed.

Q: The leader of the Welsh Conservatives said today that he wanted you to bring forward your revelations for a winter plan for the NHS something Boris Johnson did earlier this week, when can we expect that from you and do you accept that that is a matter of urgency?

A: Well we've announced further restrictions today, I'm not sure where the Leader of the Opposition has been, because we have a plan. And we've published it already. Our alert level control plan is there for anybody to see it shows exactly how, if we needed to do so, we would move back up the five levels of restriction here in Wales. We are at alert levels zero at the moment, and a plan sets out how we would have to move through 123 and finally, in the, you know, much to be hoped we never get there eventuality, right up at alert level four, we have regularly published updates on the plan and we do plan to publish a further update of the control plan. Following today's announcements, but in Wales, we didn't need to have a new, separate winter control plan, because we've had that plan there in the public domain for many, many months.

Q: On the subject of international travel the UK governments are widely expected to announce big changes to that today, scrapping of the traffic light system and potentially the scrapping of the requirement for fully vaccinated travellers to test before and after they get home. If that is the case, if they do proceed with that, where does that leave the Welsh Government?

A: Well, there's a lot of material in that very hypothetical question because neither you nor I have actually seen what is being proposed by the UK Government. Let me deal with your final point first. We required people in Wales to use an NHS PCR test, up until the point that we were satisfied that the private providers will be providers that will provide a proper service, and a service that would accurately report the results of tests into the Welsh NHS. The UK government had to take 91 providers off the list originally published because it was demonstrable that they weren't able to provide the service of the sort that was required, despite the fact that 1000s of people would have used them because they were on the UK government's approved list, because the Markets Authority has now published its report, cleaned up the performance of private providers. Now we're satisfied that they are operating to a standard Welsh citizens can rely on. That's why we made the decision and it was a decision that was entirely for us to make. We will wait to see what the UK Government has to say on foreign travel we've always urged them to take a more precautionary approach than they have so far. When they amend their lists, it was very difficult for us not to follow because most people who travel from Wales, travel from airports and seaports outside Wales, but the testing regime in exactly the way that the final part of your question demonstrated is something for us to decide. We'll wait to see what is proposed by the UK Government for England, and then we'll decide on what we think offers the best public health protection to people here in Wales.

Q: You said earlier that younger people have been slower to take up the offer of a vaccination compared with other age groups. So you're not punishing younger people by introducing COVID passes, as they are more likely to be attending nightclubs and large events?

A: I don't regard it as a punishment to put something in place that will help those young people to stay safe and through them to help other people to stay safe as well.

Q: If people who were fully vaccinated can still be asymptomatic for Coronavirus. Why is having a COVID pass necessary?

A: Well, it's a good point to make, because neither vaccination, nor a pass is a magic bullet. You know, being vaccinated does provide you with significant advantages to yourself and to others and it does make you less likely to transmit the virus asymptotically to other people. But it doesn't stop it from happening. Nor does it stop you, contracting Coronavirus. So, we're not introducing the COVID on the basis that it magically removes all the risk. What it does is lower the risk and to the repertoire of things that we are doing in Wales to try to reduce the risk, because everything we do in that way every little thing we do makes its contribution, collectively, it adds up to the things that Sage said that we should be doing and what we should be doing now. So, doing anybody, but a COVID pass is somehow going to eliminate all the risks that you will face in going to high risk venues. It will be another defence alongside all the other things as we heard earlier, that those settings are already doing to try to make them as safe as possible.

Q: The night time Industries Association Wales Commission has said, introducing a COVID pass would be a hugely detrimental impact on the nightclub sector. Do you disagree with an assessment or do you accept there could be a negative impact?

A: I do disagree with that assessment. The whole purpose of it is to keep that sector open. If we have to move back up the alert levels in our control plan from level zero to level one. At level one, clubs are closed. So you know they were, they were the last to reopen. And they might be the first to have to close. The reason we are taking the measures we are today, is to help to keep them open. They're there to help. Not to be an obstructive measure in the path of the industry and I think many people in the industry who use the COVID Pass already will regard it in that way.

Q: Are you concerned the COVID pass scheme will be difficult to police, a person could show a photo of any passcode on the phone, get way through because there's a large queue the process will door staff be required to house a barcode scanner system?

A: The system that exists already, and it's available as an NHS app that is free for them to use. So yes there will be systems, can you design a system that people are deliberately and knowingly setting out to evade. Well, you can't. But in the enforcement regime as I said before, we will consider whether there should be a specific offence, you know with criminal justice consequences for people who put themselves in that position.

Q: So with the vaccine passes being introduced in Wales in England there won't be a solid alternative. How will it work in areas like north Wales which share a border with England?

A: Well, whenever we have something different in Wales and different in England, then people have to find a way of navigating that and by and large have learned to do it very successfully, just remind everybody that the UK Government has not abandoned the idea of vaccine certification. They were as you know, up to a week ago, still saying it was going to be going ahead, immediately, they still intend to publish the regulations for vaccine certification. They say that if they need to move to Plan B, they will introduce it. So, different decisions are made on different in different parts of the United Kingdom, border issues are always there to be resolved. I don't think this one is difficult, because there will be many venues in England that already using the COVID Pass.

Q: Do you see these measures that you've announced today as enough to prevent any sort of further lockdown measures in the future. And do you believe that going forward with this five step plan that is achievable, that the people of Wales can do this?

A: Well, the whole reason for taking these measures, and taking them early, is as I've said to keep Wales safe and to keep Wales open. The best advice we have from our own scientists and from Sage is that by taking these sorts of measures now, we maximise the chance that we will not need to do more to contain the virus in the future. But we will continue to prepare in case we face an even more difficult winter from Coronavirus than we currently predict. So, I am confident that these measures will help. I am confident that they will play a part in keeping us all safe and keeping businesses open. But as ever in the Welsh government, we prepare for all eventualities. And if more measures had to be taken, then we would not shy away from them. If they were necessary to protect the health and well-being of people in Wales.

Thanks,

Name Redacted

~~Saman Ringgold~~
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