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# Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement – 11 May 2021

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**This document is part of a collection**

## Coronavirus update from the First Minister: 11 May 2021



Due to the election campaign, the last time I stood here to give you a Covid briefing was three weeks ago, so I am glad today to be able to provide a full update and set out our decisions on the next steps forward. My remarks will therefore be slightly longer than normal.

I am joined by the Chief Medical Officer and the National Clinical Director, who will help me answer questions.

Before that, the main purpose of my remarks is to confirm that the move to level 2, with the associated changes to the Covid rules, scheduled for next Monday 17 May will go ahead as planned in most parts of Scotland.

Indeed, in one respect - which I will cover shortly - we are able to go slightly further than previously anticipated.

However, there are two geographic exceptions to this which I will flag up now, but cover in more detail later.

In recent days, Moray has been experiencing a high and increasing number of cases with a small associated increase in hospital admissions. Indeed, public health experts consider that Moray is currently experiencing widespread community transmission of the virus.

It is therefore highly probable, though a final decision will be taken at the end of this week, that Moray will have to remain in level 3 for a further period - though I hope it will be a relatively short one.

However – more happily – the situation in some of our island communities is now sufficiently under control that we are able to ease restrictions there more quickly than on the mainland. Therefore, from Monday, we expect that island communities will move down to level 1.

I am going to come on to more detail on all of that at a slightly later point, but I wanted to flag up the main decisions at the outset of this statement.

Normally, at this point, I would update you on the daily statistics. Unfortunately, I am not able to do that right now due to a significant IT issue affecting Public Health Scotland this morning. I hope that will be resolved soon and can assure you that all of today's figures will be published just as quickly as possible. You will be able to access them when they are published on the Scottish Government website.

However, what we know from our recent run of daily statistics is that over the past three weeks the success of the vaccination programme, and I want to convey my thanks to everyone involved in that. The success of the vaccination programme – and continued high compliance on the part of the general population with the various rules and restrictions – means that we have seen continued suppression the virus.

Since I last stood here, cases have continued to fall – from an average of 226 new cases a day to 177. That said, in the last week, there has been a very slight increase in cases.

That is driven, largely, by the situation in Moray - which I will address shortly - but, together with the emergence of new variants globally, should be a sharp reminder to all of us that this virus remains a very real threat.

Notwithstanding the changes I am about to confirm, we must all continue to be careful, responsible and vigilant. And, of course, our levels system means that we can - and will if required - apply the brakes to deal with outbreaks as they arise.

However, the situation overall is now a very positive one - and so we are now in a position to relax more restrictions and restore much more normality to our everyday lives.

I can therefore confirm that from next Monday, all parts of mainland Scotland, with the highly probable exception of Moray, will move from current level 3 to level 2.

Before I set out what that means, let me address the exceptions to that.

Firstly, some further detail and context on the situation in Moray. At the moment, across Scotland as a whole, we are seeing 23 new cases a week for every 100,000 people in the population. Levels are relatively low and much lower than they have been for a long time in Scotland as a whole.

But in Moray, rates are more than 4 times higher, at 94 new cases per 100,000 people. As I said earlier, there is in the opinion of public health experts, widespread community transmission happening in Moray just now.

Against that backdrop - unless the situation was to materially improve over the next few days - it would simply not be safe or sensible to ease restrictions there from Monday.

That is why I have to flag up today that it is therefore highly probably that Moray will stay at level 3 for a further period.

It is also important that we take precautions to reduce the risk of the transmission of Covid that is happening in Moray spreading from there to other parts of Scotland, as restrictions start to ease more significantly elsewhere.

So if Moray does stay in level 3 - which will be finally decided at the end of the week - we will also reimpose travel restrictions again for a hopefully short period. This will mean that travel in and out of Moray will be limited to permitted purposes only.

If the decision is to keep Moray at level 3 - and right now, I do consider that to be very likely - I can confirm that we will provide additional financial assistance to businesses that will be affected by that. And also, given how deeply unwelcome I know this will be for people living in the Moray area, I can also confirm that we will be doing everything possible to ensure that any extension of level 3 is for as short a period as possible.

We are already working closely with both Moray Council and Grampian Health Board to reduce case numbers as quickly as possible. For example, a mobile testing unit has been moved to Elgin, and people are being strongly encouraged to take up lateral flow tests. I would appeal to everyone living in the Moray region to follow all the public health advice so that we can get the situation back under control as quickly as possible and allow Moray to get back on to a positive track just as soon as it is safe and possible to do so.

For our island communities, the situation is different and very much more positive. Case numbers have consistently been at very low levels for some time now.

Many islands also have very good vaccination coverage and lateral flow tests are available for all people travelling to the islands from other parts of Scotland.

For those reason, we have decided that it is possible and proportionate to now ease restrictions on the islands more quickly:

- for communities in the Western Isles, Shetland and Orkney;
- for all islands in Highland, except Skye, given its fixed link;
- and for the Inner Hebrides islands in Argyll - including Islay, Jura and Mull.

All of these areas will move directly to level 1 from Monday, rather than to level 2. The full details of what that means are available on the Scottish Government website.

But – for example – it means fewer restrictions on indoor hospitality.

Everywhere else in Scotland will move to level 2 from Monday. And so I want to spend a bit of time setting out what that change means in practice.

It means, firstly, that we will be able to meet outdoors in groups of 8 from up to 8 households – rather than in groups of 6 as is the case now.

And, even more significantly, we will be able to meet in each other's homes, including for overnight stays.

It was initially intended that, at level 2, up to 4 people from no more than 2 households could meet indoors. However, we consider that it is possible to go slightly further.

So from Monday, up to 6 people from 3 households will be able to meet indoors in each other's houses.

This is still a cautious change. But it is also a hugely important one.

It is almost eight months now since most of us have been able to meet in each other's homes – and it has been even longer than that for those of us living in Glasgow and Lanarkshire.

I know how much all of us have been looking forward to being able to do that again. It is one of the simple pleasures of life that I suspect none of us will ever take for granted again.

This is an important change in and of itself, but I am pleased to say that, in one respect, we consider that it is possible to go further than previously anticipated.

From Monday, if you are meeting friends and family, within the permitted limits of course, either indoors in a private dwelling or your garden, our guidance will make clear that it is no longer necessary to maintain physical distance.

Which means - and I actually feel a bit emotional saying this - that from Monday, as long as you stay within permitted limits, you can hug your loved ones again.

I know how desperate we all are for this - and so I don't intend to immediately pour cold water on it - but there are two further points I need to make.

Firstly, it remains vital to be cautious and to ease these restrictions carefully - so for the next 3 weeks, the easing of the guidance on physical distancing will apply to permitted gatherings in our own homes and gardens only.

However, over that period, we will also be conducting a wider review of the need for physical distancing in public indoor places and will set out the conclusions of that at the next review point.

And secondly, this is perhaps the more difficult point, please use careful judgment. Close physical contact does still carries risk, I have got to be very clear with you about that, so if you have loved ones who are vulnerable for any reason, please still be careful. And limit the overall number of people that you are choosing to have close physical contact with.

It is worth making the point that as we progress further into the next phases of the pandemic, prescriptive rules and regulations will increasingly give way to greater personal judgment. That

can, and will, be difficult I know - but it is an essential part of our gradual return to normality. Please continue to be careful and cautious as we take these next steps forward.

Let me turn now to the other changes that come with the move to level 2.

In hospitality settings - such as pubs, restaurants and cafés - groups of up to 6 people from up to 3 households will be allowed to meet together.

From Monday, alcohol can be served indoors up until 10.30pm. I know that the return of licensed indoors hospitality will be welcomed by businesses and customers across the country.

A new app – Check in Scotland – was launched at the end of April, to help Test and Protect easily contact people who need to self-isolate. Please download and use the app if you can. Hospitality venues are required to take your contact details, so please co-operate with that.

There are several other important changes that will come into effect next Monday subject, of course, to appropriate mitigations.

- A number of venues will be able to reopen – including cinemas, theatres, concert halls, comedy clubs, amusement arcades, casinos, snooker halls and bingo halls.
- Amateur performing arts groups will be able to perform outdoors initially.
- Colleges and universities will have more flexibility to resume in-person learning.
- Outdoor adult contact sports can resume.
- More than one person will be able to sing during religious services – a change which many faith groups have asked for and will welcome - although at this stage it does not include congregational singing.

The standard limit for the number of people who can attend specific events will increase. From Monday, up to 100 people will be able to attend an indoor event. Up to 250 people will be able to attend an outdoor event with unrestricted standing. And up to 500 people will be able to attend an outdoor event with seating.

It is important to stress that these are standard limits. However, events organisers have the ability to make applications to hold bigger events and they will be assessed accordingly.

We will continue to review the rules on events, in consultation with the events sector and updated guidance may well be published during the next three weeks.

And as I said earlier, we will be reviewing the guidance on physical distancing – which is relevant to the events sector and also to many other businesses. If it is possible over the next few weeks to relax the current rules and guidance on this, we will certainly do so.

Finally, I want to confirm that we will make some changes to the rules on international travel. At the outset of this, let me be very, very clear difficult as I know this is, we still intend to be highly

cautious on international travel - given the risk of new variants - but we consider that the situation now allows us to begin a careful move away from blanket restrictions on non-essential travel overseas.

From Monday, we will move to a traffic light system, informed by risk assessments prepared by the Joint Biosecurity Centre. These assessments will be based on the state of the pandemic in each country across the world and that will include the presence of variants of concern.

If you enter Scotland from a red list country – one of the countries identified as acute-risk under our current regulations - you will still be required to enter a managed isolation hotel and stay there for 10 days. Due to changes coming into force from tomorrow, these red list countries will include Turkey, the Maldives and Nepal.

If you arrive from a country on the amber list – for now that will be the majority of countries – you must self-isolate at home for 10 days, and take two PCR tests during that period.

We will also introduce a Green List of countries. If you travel from a green-list country, you will need to take a PCR test shortly after your arrival, but will not be required to self-isolate.

The four UK Chief Medical Officers have said that green-list status should be the exception, rather than the rule, and I agree with that approach. There will have to be very good reasons for adding a country to the green list and so removing quarantine requirements and we will not do that lightly.

I can confirm initially the 12 countries and territories on the initial green list will be the same as those announced for England. For now, this is a limited list and includes

- Australia
- Brunei
- Falkland Islands
- Faroe Islands
- Gibraltar
- Iceland
- Israel
- New Zealand
- Portugal
- Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan de Cunha
- Singapore
- South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

This decision means that, as of now, we have a consistent four nations position on international travel. That is positive - and it has been made possible because the decisions the UK government

has arrived at are appropriately cautious.

I hope this continues to be the case - but I need to stress that the Scottish Government will continue to take the decisions we consider to be right for Scotland. We will not sign up to decisions that might put our progress at risk.

We have made so much progress in suppressing the virus within Scotland we must not put that at risk now, by enabling new variants to enter the country too easily.

And for that reason, I want to stress one final point very strongly. Even though the rules on non-essential travel are starting to change, that doesn't mean we are saying that non-essential international travel is desirable.

Everyone should think seriously about whether they need to travel abroad this summer. I know for many people international travel is about family connections and it's understandable that people may want to travel for that.

But when it comes to holidays abroad, my advice continues to be to err on the side of caution and to staycation this summer. The importance of following guidance and exercising caution is the note I want to end on.

Next week's changes are really important, the most important yet.

I suspect many of you will already be looking forward to meeting up with a friend at home; to having a drink indoors in a pub or restaurant; and to hugging a member of your close family. Enjoy those moments when they come. They have been greatly missed and hard-earned by all of us.

And I hope and expect that they will be followed – fairly soon - by further steps in the right direction.

I hope Moray will be in level 2 soon. And for the rest of the mainland, I have already said that if circumstances allow, we will move to level 1 on Monday 7 June, and then to level 0 on Monday, 28 June.

Level 0, of course, still involves restrictions and I hope and expect that we can move on to something much more like normality, over the course of the summer, and into the autumn.

For example, if we can, we will continue to relax physical distancing rules. And when it is safe to do so – for example once all of the adult population is fully vaccinated – we hope to be able to move to the removal of these kind of rules altogether but I can't put a date on that quite yet.

But in order to ensure that we do continue to make progress, we must continue to exercise good sense and caution. The more we can suppress the virus, the more quickly we can open things up.

So please - continue to work from home for now if you can. Use the Check in Scotland app if you are going to pubs and restaurants.



Download the Protect Scotland app – if you haven't done it already – and make sure that it is activated when you are out and about. Continue to be highly cautious about international travel.

And when you are outside, still remember FACTS.

- wear face coverings;
- avoid places that are busy;
- clean hands and surfaces;
- still use two metre distancing for people outside your own limited groups of family and friends when you are in your home or in your garden.
- and self-isolate and book a test if you have symptoms.

It is still important that we stick to those rules – as so many of us have done for more than a year - because that is how we continue to look after each other and continue to help the NHS, treat those who need it, and ultimately to save lives.

I hope today's update has been, as I warned you, longer than normal. I hope you think it's a positive one, it's been hard earned but we must, must keep doing the right things so that we continue to move in this positive forward direction.

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- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, but

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