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Publication - Speech/statement

Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement - 27 August 2021

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Statement given by the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on Friday 27 August 2021.

Good afternoon

I'm joined today by Jason Leitch, the National Clinical Director. He and I will take questions shortly.

However before that, I'll give a further update on where we are with Covid, starting with today's statistics.

We are reporting another sharp rise in cases today. 6,835 positive cases were reported yesterday - that is by the far the highest number in a single day so far. It represents 14.2% of all tests carried out.

479 people are in hospital with Covid – 53 more than yesterday.

And 47 people are in intensive care, which is the same as yesterday.

However, for some context, I should also say there was a record number of tests carried out yesterday. That doesn't entirely explain and account for the rise, but it does give some important context.

Sadly, a further 4 deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours, which means that the total number of deaths registered, under our daily definition, is now 8,103.

As always, my condolences go to everyone who has lost someone as a result of the virus.

As of this morning, 4,095,463 people have received a first dose of the vaccine.

And 3,629,482 people have received a second dose.

The vast majority of people over the age of 40 – 95% of them – have now had two doses of the vaccine.

70% of 30 to 39 year olds have also had both doses. For 18 to 29 years, 74% have had first doses and 46% have had second doses and are ongoing in this age group.

And 44% of 16 and 17 year olds have now had their first jab.

Those rates of vaccination are positive and continue to give us optimism for the remainder of our path through this pandemic.

If we are fully vaccinated, we are somewhat less likely to get Covid – although, as I said on Tuesday, around a third of new cases at the moment are of people who have been vaccinated.

However, even more importantly, we know that being fully vaccinated makes us significantly less likely to fall seriously ill from Covid.

That is why the high number of new cases that we are seeing has not so far led to the same number of hospitalisations that we saw in previous waves of the pandemic.

That said, the case numbers that we are seeing at the moment are still a cause for concern.

In the last 7 days, we have reported more new cases than at any previous time in the pandemic. Case numbers have roughly doubled in that time.

It's important to point out case numbers are rising across the UK just now - but after a period of slower increases in Scotland, the rise here is particularly sharp at the moment.

That is possibly - at least in part - a reflection of the fact that our schools return earlier, with the increased interactions that come with that.

And although vaccination has significantly weakened the link between a high volume of new cases, and serious harm to people's health, it has not broken that link.

Even if a much smaller proportion of people who get Covid now need to go to hospital, basic arithmetic tells us that a small percentage of a very large number is still a big number.

Indeed, in recent days we have seen an increase in the number of people in hospital. To provide some context, last Friday, 312 people were in hospital with Covid – today's figure is 479.

And of course people who do not go to hospital can still suffer serious illness – including through long Covid.

The potential health impact on individuals is a concern in itself.

It will also put our health service under further pressure – at a time when many staff have been working flat out for 18 months, and when we are trying to catch up with a backlog of other

procedures.

At the start of the pandemic, "protect the NHS" was one of our key messages – it is still something that all of us need to bear in mind at this stage.

All of this is why, on Tuesday, I described our current position as fragile.

There is no doubt that the vaccines have allowed us to take a far less restrictive approach to dealing with the virus, than we did at earlier stages of the pandemic.

And we know that the measures which have been in place for much of the last 17 months have in themselves caused serious harm. They have disrupted schools, hurt the economy and affected wellbeing.

That is why - even although, if we are at all responsible, we can't and shouldn't rule anything out in the face of a pandemic, none of us want to go backwards to even limited restrictions.

But we cannot ignore the current surge in cases either. My job in times like these is not to be popular - it is to take any decisions, no matter how difficult, that are necessary to keep us safe.

In particular, we are currently watching closely to see whether – and to what extent – we might start to see a significant increase in serious illness and people being hospitalized.

I will continue to keep you updated in the days ahead. Though I want to be clear that some of the speculation you might be reading in the media just now is not accurate - for example, we are not currently considering a circuit breaker lockdown.

For the moment, though, I do need to stress the vital importance of everyone playing their part in limiting the spread of the virus. The more we all do this, the more chance we have of avoiding the need to re-impose any formal restrictions.

So we are asking businesses to ensure that they continue encouraging employees and customers to comply fully with Covid mitigations. That includes wearing face coverings in indoor public spaces where required.

Businesses should also, at present, continue to work with staff to support home working where at all possible.

It is of course vital for businesses - as it is for everyone - that we slow the spread of the virus, and avoid the need for further restrictions, and I am grateful to all of the businesses across the country who are doing so much to help achieve this.

In addition, of course, all of us as individuals have a really important part to play. All of us have some control here over transmission.

And there are three steps in particular that we must all take, to help to keep the pandemic under control. So I will close by emphasizing those once again and remind people how important it is that we all abide by these mitigations.

First, if you are eligible and haven't yet done so, please get vaccinated. This remains the single most important thing we can all do to keep each other safe.

There are drop-in vaccination centres in every mainland health board area – and you can find out details of where they are, on the NHS inform website, or by following local health boards on social media.

So if you haven't been vaccinated yet – or if you had your first dose 8 or more weeks ago, and haven't had a second dose - you can turn up at your nearest centre and get the jab.

And if you have any doubts about vaccination, go along to a centre anyway – the staff and volunteers there will be able to answer your questions, and talk to you about the process.

Second, please test yourself regularly. If you do that, then if you have the virus but don't have symptoms - you have a chance of finding that out before you go out to work or to socialise. Testing yourself therefore makes it less likely that you will inadvertently pass the virus to others.

You can order free lateral flow tests through the NHS inform website. The tests will then be sent to you in the post, or you can collect them from local pharmacies or test sites.

If you test positive through one of these lateral flow devices - or if you have symptoms of the virus - make sure that you self-isolate, and book a PCR test. Self-isolation remains a really important way in which we can all slow the spread of the virus.

And thirdly and finally, please follow the rules and public health guidance which are still in place.

That's important for all of us. Even basic steps – wearing face coverings on public transport, and opening a window if you have someone in your house to make sure there is good ventilation – can still make a big difference.

So please remember it is still a requirement to wear face coverings in certain indoor public places, such as shops, public transport and when entering and moving about in hospitality settings. That's a simple but important way in which we can protect each other.

And more generally, it is important in these current circumstances, we think about how often we're socializing and with how many others, what risks we are running when we go out and about, and the basic steps that reduce those risks.

Meet outdoors as much as possible.

If you are indoors, avoid crowded places. And open the windows – the better ventilated a room is, the safer it is.

Even though it's not the law any more, keep a safe distance from people in other households if you can - especially indoors.

Continue to minimise physical contact where possible - like handshaking, for example.

And wash your hands and surfaces regularly and thoroughly.

If we all comply with all of these measures, we will help limit the spread of Covid.

We will make ourselves and our loved ones safer.

And we can maintain the progress that we have made, and to keep on living more freely.

So please - get vaccinated, get tested, and tighten up again on following the rules and guidelines.

Thank you.

Was this helpful?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, but

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