



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

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I&S

*From the Private Secretary*

17 December 2021

Dear **NR**

**Action to Address the Omicron Variant**

The real-time spread of the Omicron variant is significant and there are clear risks associated with the increases in case numbers which are being seen. We have also seen the data and modelling presented to SAGE. The Department is continuing to ensure the health and care system is as resilient as possible and taking action in the ten areas set out in my note of 7 December. We are acting fast to roll out vaccine boosters, increase testing, make the health and care system as resilient as possible, and to roll out treatments, and must continue to do so.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care considers, however, that the Government should take further decisive action quickly to slow the spread of the virus, going beyond the Plan B measures. He understands that this is in advance of a clear understanding of severity and hospitalisation data, and therefore there is a risk that some pre-emptive actions could retrospectively be deemed to be more than necessary. However, with exponential case growth and knowing that there will not be certainty for some time, he takes the view that we must take proportionate steps now in advance of definitive data.

In doing so it is of course essential that we take the public with us in explaining the balance of risks. If we wait and the situation deteriorated significantly it would then be too late to take decisive action to mitigate the spread the Omicron, and therefore increase the chances of requiring more restrictive – and costly - measures. It is in seeking to avoid that eventuality that he has considered the balance between the pressure on health services - including elective recovery, the need to protect the economy, societal freedoms, and the wellbeing of individuals and communities as a whole.

We should therefore move quickly now to implement measures that were in place at Step 2 of the Roadmap (see Annex A). Taking firm action now will mean a shorter intervention and reduce the risk that we will need to increase measures later. The Roadmap measures were effective and well understood by the public. They also provide an effective route for de-escalation. Not taking action now risks the position that we will need to take stronger action in a week's time. We also need to ensure that we can take the public with us, especially over the Christmas and holiday period.

We should:

- Implement the Step 2 package, with associated financial support enablers, bringing regulations and guidance into force next week, and repeal the certification regulations as needed. This would, for example, close indoor hospitality and mass events as soon as possible.
- Implement the social contact restrictions in the Step 2 measures from 27 December, later than other measures.
- Schedule a Parliamentary vote next week prior to the regulations coming into force.
- Set out an exit strategy. We should say we would proceed through the Steps, as before, with a review point in mid-January. At that point we may be able to de-escalate to Step 3, or perhaps to Step 4. In doing so, we should be guided by the data.

There are clear advantages to moving quickly. The Secretary of State believes the Government should take decisions in the next 24 hours and is ready to discuss as needed.

Yours ever,

**Personal Data**

**NR**

**Senior Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care**

## **Annex A - Step 2 of the Roadmap**

### **1) Settings**

- All hospitality venues (pubs, bars, restaurants) may only operate outdoors with a requirement to order, eat and drink whilst seated
- All nightclubs and analogous settings to close
- Outdoor attractions (such as zoos, theme parks, drive in cinemas) may remain open, however any indoor sections should close
- All retail remains open
- Personal care may remain open
- Libraries and Community Centres remain open
- Indoor leisure (including gyms) open for use individually or within household groups

### **2) Face Coverings**

- Mandatory wearing of a face covering in all indoor public places and on public transport. Guidance to continue to wear a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces where you may come into contact with other people you do not normally meet

### **3) Social Contact**

- No indoor household mixing (other than where exempt, e.g. linked households)
- Rule of 6, or two households, outdoors including in private gardens.
- All children's activities and indoor parent and child groups with up to 15 attendees (not including under 5s) may go ahead.

### **4) Events**

- Wakes, weddings, and receptions with up to 15 attendees permitted. Wedding receptions must take place in outdoor COVID-secure settings
- Funerals with up to 30 attendees permitted.

#### 5) Business and activities

- Continuation of Work from Home Guidance
- 1m+ rule applies, with Covid-secure measures

#### 6) Travel and accommodation

- Minimise Travel, no international holidays.
- Domestic overnight stays permitted (household only)
- Self-contained accommodation (household only)