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Publication - Speech/statement

Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement – 20 April 2021

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Coronavirus update from the First Minister: 20 April 2021



Good afternoon, thanks for tuning in today.

I am joined by the Chief Medical Officer, and the National Clinical Director.

As you probably know the main purpose of today's update is to indicate our final decision on the proposed changes, quite substantial proposed changes to the Covid rules that are due to take effect from Monday next week, Monday 26th April.

These changes include the full reopening of retail services and the partial reopening of hospitality.

Before I talk in a bit more detail about those though let me give you today's statistics.

The total number of cases reported yesterday was 178.

Which is 1.4% of the total number of tests, and it means that the overall number of confirmed cases now stands at 224,092.

106 people are currently in hospital – which is 2 more than yesterday.

And 13 people are in intensive care, that is 1 fewer than the number reported yesterday.

Unfortunately 2 deaths were reported yesterday, and that takes the total number of deaths registered under this daily definition to 7,644.

And yet again, I want to send my deepest condolences to everyone across the country who is grieving a loved one.

Let me also give an update on the vaccination programme.

As of 7.30 this morning, 2,750,052 people have received the first dose of the vaccine.

That is an increase of 2,358 since yesterday.

However, in addition, 40,152 people received a second dose yesterday, and the total number of second doses administered now is 797,267.

We have now given a first dose of vaccine to more than 60% of the adult population.

Last week, we effectively met the target of offering a first dose to all over 50 year olds; all unpaid carers and all adults with particular underlying health conditions. Now inevitably there will be some people in these categories who for one reason or another may not have had their invitation letter yet perhaps your address has been changed or your letter has gone missing. If that is the case remember you can phone your GP or phone the national helpline and you will find the details of that on our website.

For the groups that have now been offered the first dose of vaccine which are the JCVI priority groups they account for 99% of all Covid deaths. The fact that a first dose has been offered to everyone in those groups – and that there has been such a high take-up of the vaccine so far – is a really important milestone, and that is one of the factors that is giving us the confidence to ease restrictions further.

In the past seven days, we have also seen continued, welcome evidence, that case numbers are continuing to fall.

Seven days ago, we were reporting 287 new cases every day on average. At the moment, we are reporting 226 cases a day on average. And overall since early January we have seen a reduction more than 90% in the average daily case numbers.

Our weekly case rate, per hundred thousand people, has also fallen
from 38 to 30 over the past 7 days.

The number of people in hospital and intensive care is also on a downward trend. We have seen a very small increase in the numbers in hospital today. We will see fluctuations like that on a day to day basis but at the moment the trend is firmly downwards.

And thankfully as we continue to see the number of deaths is also falling. Although every single death is still one that is causing grief to a family somewhere across the country and we should never lose sight of that.

But all in all we have seen sustained improvement and that has already allowed us to relax restrictions in recent weeks.

Almost all children are now back at school full-time – which I know will be a massive relief to them and to their parents.

Over the weekend just past, new rules came into force for outdoor meetings and of course the travel restrictions within Scotland were lifted.

Taking all of the recent data into account, I am pleased to be able to confirm today that from Monday – 26 April – those parts of the country that are currently in level 4 which of course includes all of the mainland of Scotland will move to down to level 3.

We then expect, assuming that the data continues to go in the right direction, that all of Scotland will move to level 2 on Monday 17 May. And that shift will mean for example that from 17 May people will be able to meet in small numbers in each other's homes for the first time in a long time, there will be further reopening of hospitality, and outdoor contact sport for adults will resume.

Then, if circumstances permit, I can confirm that it would be the intention to move to level 1 on Monday 7 June, before then I hope moving to level 0 in late June – and then as we go into the deeper part of the summer, to something much more like normality, over the course of July.

So we are hopeful, very hopeful, of seeing sustained progress in the weeks and months ahead.

But of course I want to focus today on the changes that will take place most immediately from Monday coming – that's Monday 26 April.

And first in doing that I want to address some information specifically to people who have been on the shielding list because they are especially clinically vulnerable to Covid.

From next Monday, the Chief Medical Officer's advice will be that people on the shielding list can return to the workplace - if you can't work from home. Like everyone else, if you can work from home then for now, you should be working from home.

If you need to return to work, you should speak to your employer about how your workplace can be made safe.

In addition, from next Monday, children who have been shielding can return to school.

I know just how difficult that last few months have been for everyone, but I don't think there's any doubt they have been especially difficult for people who have been required to shield.

So I am very grateful to all of you for everything you have done to keep yourselves safe but also to help keep other people safe as well. And I much hope that over the next few weeks you can enjoy being able to get out and about a bit more, and that the very understandable anxiety that you have been living with for this past year is beginning to reduce, even just a little bit.

Now, most of the other changes I am going to set out will of course apply to everyone.

From next Monday, all shops which are still closed will be able to re-open and all close contact services - such as beauty parlours - can re-open. Hairdressers of course opened a couple of weeks ago.

It will be, from Monday, possible to collect takeaway food indoors – rather than having to collect it from a hatch or window.

And hospitality venues like cafés, pubs and restaurants can re-open too. In outdoor settings, opening hours will be determined by local licensing laws.

Alcohol can be served outdoors from Monday, and people will be able to meet in groups of up to 6, from up to 6 different households.

The rules for hospitality indoors are different – because the risks of transmission are greater indoors. Cafes, pubs and restaurants from Monday will be able to open indoors until 8 o'clock in the evening – but not yet able serve alcohol indoors.

Up to 6 people will be allowed to meet indoors – however they must come from a maximum of two households. Contrary to some suggestions that you might have seen in the media, the requirements on physical distancing for hospitality, in our latest guidance on this, have not changed from the guidance that was in place previously.

We are also publishing today updated guidance on the collection of customer contact details.

This guidance makes it clear that venues should take down contact details for all of their customers – not just for the lead member of each group.

And that is an additional precaution, which is really important to help with contact tracing in the event of any outbreak.

And of course it is important to remember that although indoor socialising is permitted in public places albeit in limited numbers – cafes and restaurants for example – it is not yet permitted in our own homes.

And I know that can seem illogical. It can also seem really difficult and unfair because it is difficult and unfair but we know that the risks of transmission are higher or can be higher in the home than in a café or bar because it can be harder to stick to physical distancing and to ensure good ventilation. So we hope that the rules on in-home socialising will ease from 17 May but not immediately on 26 April.

From 26 April, the attendance limit at funerals and weddings – and related events like wakes and receptions – will also increase from 20 to 50.

In addition, tourist accommodation can re-open from Monday. However in self-catering accommodation, the rules on indoor meetings still apply.

Which means that, until 17 May, two households can't stay in the same accommodation.

Other changes that come into force from Monday are as follows:

- non-essential informal childcare can re-start;

- Non-essential work is again permitted inside people's homes. That includes cleaning – and also repair work, and painting and decorating;
- Driving lessons and driving tests can resume;
- Gyms and swimming pools can re-open for individual exercise; and
- indoor attractions and public buildings – such as galleries, museums and libraries – are also able to re-open from Monday.

Finally – but very importantly – I can confirm that all remaining travel restrictions will be lifted on 26 April for travel anywhere in Scotland, and for travel between Scotland, England and Wales.

So from Monday, you can travel anywhere across Britain for any purpose.

We will also remove restrictions on Monday on travel to and from Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man - though people should check the rules on entry to each of these territories before you travel.

Now it is important for me to stress that we might need to enforce local travel restrictions from time to time – either within Scotland or between Scotland and parts of the rest of the UK - if there are areas that have flare ups of Covid, local outbreaks or where the general situation is causing concern. But I hope this general easing of travel restrictions from Monday will be welcome to lots of people and I know will be particularly welcome to people in Scotland who have family in England or indeed vice versa.

Now, there are a couple of other points I want to make just before I finish and move to questions today. The first relates to testing.

Two weeks ago I indicated that we would make lateral flow tests available to anyone in Scotland who wants one.

I can confirm therefore that lateral flow testing will be available to anyone in Scotland from 26 April.

You can order lateral flow test online for delivery to your home – and you can find information on how to do that on the Scottish Government's website.

Alternatively, you can collect the tests from Covid testing centres in the afternoon or early evening.

I would encourage everyone to take advantage of this offer – but I want to highlight one issue in particular today where we are really encouraging people to make sure they use lateral flow testing as appropriate.

Last week I spoke about the situation on our islands.

We are keeping island communities at the same level as the rest of the country at the moment, so that we can allow travel between island communities and the rest of Scotland.

But we know this does create a risk for our island communities. Many of them currently have very, very low rates of Covid. And they will be welcoming visitors from parts of Scotland which I know many of them are looking forward to where Covid will still be circulating at a higher level and more widely.

So if you are planning to travel to an island we do encourage you to take two lateral flow tests before you depart.

The second test should be on the day that you are planning to travel, and the first should be three days before you travel.

That means that if you test positive, you have a chance to take a PCR test - which is more sensitive - to confirm the result before making a final decision on cancelling your visit.

This is potentially an important way in which we can minimise the risk, of bringing Covid into island communities while nevertheless allowing our island communities the benefit of opening up again to visitors. So if you are planning on travelling to an island over the course of next week, it is possible to get tests from today, and I would encourage you to do that.

Now the final point I want to stress relates to international travel.

As you may have seen in the media because of the quite rapidly and deteriorating Covid situation in India we have changed the rules in relation to travel to and from India – there is a concern as well about a new variant of the virus that is spreading there.

So from Friday, if you have been in India for essential purposes, and are returning to Scotland, you must now stay in managed accommodation for 10 days and that must be at the place where you first arrive back in the UK - so if you are travelling via London, you must stay in a hotel in London.

More importantly though, please remember that international travel for non-essential purposes is not yet permitted.

I know this is really difficult - for the aviation and tourism sector but most of all it is difficult for people who have family overseas. When we talk about international travel there is a tendency including on my part to talk about holidays but for many people going to other countries it involves seeing their family, friends and loved ones. So I understand how difficult this is and how distressing this is for a lot of people and we do want – and I want to stress this – we want to restore normality to international travel as quickly as possible. But we must be sensible as we do that in light of the risks that we face and in light of the risks that we see across many parts of the world.

We will continue to work with the UK government to try to agree a common approach to international travel in the weeks and months ahead.

But until at least 17 May – and possibly for a period after that – you should not leave the UK for non-essential purposes. That is for now an important measure to try to protect the progress we have made domestically and continue down that track of opening up our economy and society as much as possible.

So just to conclude, the changes that will come into force on Monday, building on the changes we have had in the last couple of weeks, have been really hard earned and long awaited.

I know that many people across the country will be looking forward – quite rightly and understandably – to perhaps having a drink in a beer garden, catching up for a coffee with a friend in a café, going to the shops that you've not been able to visit for some time, or perhaps taking a break somewhere in Scotland.

But even as we enjoy all of these moments, and I hope people do enjoy them because you have earned them, we still need to be careful.

Covid is at much lower levels than it has been in a long time in Scotland but as you can see from the figures it is still there, it is still circulating.

Last week, more than 1500 people in Scotland tested positive for Covid. Some of these people will require to go into hospital – others, including many young people, will suffer from long Covid.

And we must remember that the virus we are dealing with now, is much more infectious than it was when bars and cafés were last open.

So it is really important that as we enjoy these new restored freedoms we continue to be really careful and take all of the required precautions.

So in particular, for now, please don't meet up with other households in your or their homes. We know that that is a particular risk but we equally hope that that will start to ease from the middle of May.

Continue to work from home if you can.

Download the Protect Scotland app – if you still haven't done that. As you start to go out and about a bit more that will help make sure you are notified if you have been in contact with somebody who tested positive. And when you are out and about remember FACTS, that remains the most important advice to help protect yourself and others.

- wear your face coverings;
- avoid places that are busy;
- clean your hands, clean surfaces that you or others are touching;
- two metre distancing remains really important
- and self-isolate and get tested if you have symptoms.

These measures have become important all along but as we ease up and start to go about more of our normal business the FACTS advice becomes ever more important because they become in a sense the first line of defence against the virus. So please continue to be sensible, take all the necessary precautions and if we all do that, hard though it is, I am really optimistic that what we have seen in the weekend just past with some easing and the substantial easing from Monday and then into May and June, we are on journey to something that is much, much closer to the normal life we are all desperately craving. So my thanks again to everybody for your patience and forbearance and sacrifice over the past year and indeed for your patience throughout today's rather lengthy update.

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- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, but

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