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Coronavirus: Closure of social venues will lower death toll

🕒 20 March 2020 · 💬 416 Comments



"We need to protect our families"

The closure of social venues including pubs, restaurants and gyms will help save lives during the coronavirus outbreak, the first minister has said.

Arlene Foster said the move was necessary to enforce social distancing as "unfortunately some people were not listening and acting on that advice".

She told BBC Radio Ulster Inside Politics programme it was "a way of bringing down those numbers of deaths."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said **venues must close from Friday**.

Nine new cases of Covid-19 were confirmed in Northern Ireland on Friday, bringing the total to 86. One person has died.

There were 126 new confirmed cases in the Republic of Ireland on Friday, bringing the total to 683. There have been three deaths linked to the virus.

Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill said the move, which also affects leisure centres and cinemas, would be a further challenge for everyone, but said people "must adhere to them with immediate effect".

"My message to all those people out there, young people who think you are immune to this, you are not," she said.

"We are asking everybody to please follow the advice and to stay apart."

More about coronavirus



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Speaking at a joint press conference at Stormont on Friday evening, Mrs Foster also welcomed news that **the government would pay 80% of wages for employees unable to work due to the coronavirus pandemic, up to £2,500 a month**.

She said it was "a significant injection".

She added that further details of the package would emerge.

Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill said it was a tough week, which had left thousands out of a job.

She said the financial package would give some assurances and "security of income" to those affected.

"This is the right call, this is the right measure," she said.

Earlier Mrs Foster asked people to "embrace the spirit of Northern Ireland and work together" to combat the coronavirus outbreak.

She said the Northern Ireland Executive was united in its response to the crisis.

Ms O'Neill said the priority of every executive decision was to save lives.

The **first coronavirus-related death in Northern Ireland** was confirmed on Thursday.



Speaking on Good Morning Ulster on Friday morning, Mrs Foster said: "This is so much bigger than Britishness or Irishness, unionism or nationalism, orange or green - this is not what this is about.

"This is about giving hope to people that this will end, making sure that when it does end we come out the other side."

'Uphill struggle'

Ms O'Neill said Northern Ireland was facing the "challenge of a generation".

"I'm a daughter, I'm a mummy and we all understand the fear and concern - my own mummy has underlying health conditions," she said.

"So what I want for everybody else is what I want for my own family."

What do we all have to do?

Public health advice is to reduce social contact, as it poses particular risks to those most vulnerable.

People have been told they can leave the house but to remain at a distance from other people to avoid spreading the virus.

The government has said that:

Non-essential contact with others should stop - this is particularly important for people over 70, those with underlying health conditions and pregnant women

People should work from home where they can

People should avoid places like pubs, clubs and theatres

People should stop all unnecessary travel

People should wash their hands for 20 seconds with hot water and soap, and use tissues to catch sneezes and coughs before disposing of them

Anyone with a fever or persistent cough should stay at home for seven days if they live alone or 14 days if they live with others

Anyone who lives with someone displaying coronavirus symptoms should also stay at home for 14 days. People who have to isolate themselves should ask others for help

Mrs Foster also criticised "selfishness" and abuse of frontline workers.

"I was told today in one of my local chemist shops that workers were being abused because they didn't have hand sanitiser available," she said.

"These abusers need to be called out. It's disgusting, I will not stand for it."

She said that while there was much to be "fearful" about, there were also "positive messages".

"Everyone in Northern Ireland has the power to delay and defeat this cycle of infections. Wash your hands frequently and practice social distancing," she said.

Manufacturers sought for ventilators

On Thursday, Health Minister Robin Swann said he has reached out to manufacturers across Northern Ireland to help produce more ventilators.

Concerns have been raised that there are not enough to treat the number of people officials believe could fall seriously ill.

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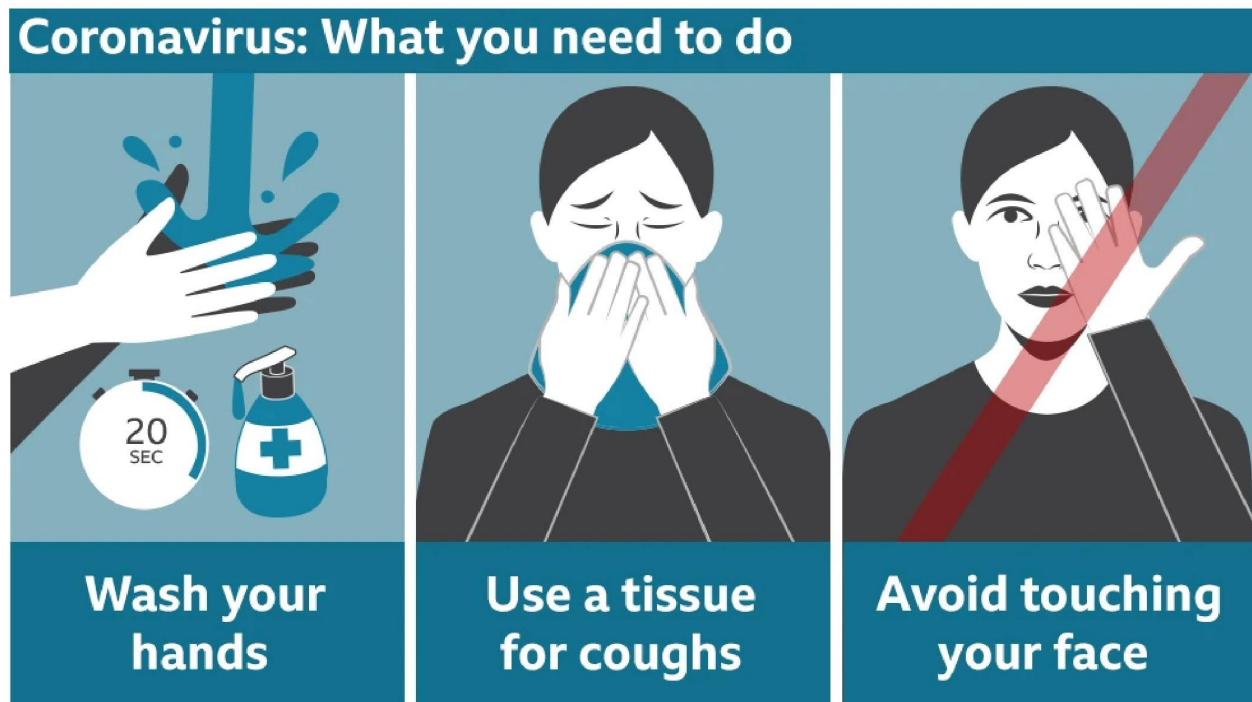
The Police Federation has warned that the coronavirus could reduce the PSNI to "a skeleton workforce" and echoed calls for more protective clothing to be made available to officers

Twelve Royal Colleges, representing thousands of medical staff, have also called on the health minister to urgently implement plans to ensure the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE)

Health charity Action Cancer said it is in "survival mode" and outlined the affect of closing its cancer services, including the end of 800 free breast screenings every month to women aged 40 to 49 and over 70

Chief Medical Officer Dr Michael McBride said testing for the coronavirus is being extended to healthcare workers in self-isolation

Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon announces **there will be a reduced public transport service from Monday as a response to the Covid-19 outbreak**



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