

# First Minister – address to the nation

Tonight, after the announcement in the Commons this afternoon of a road map to releasing the country from lockdown in stages, the First Minister addressed Scotland on TV.

This is what she said:

It's now exactly seven weeks since lockdown measures were introduced.

The extent to which you have stuck to these rules – often at great personal sacrifice – has been truly remarkable.

So I want to start with a heartfelt thank you.

By staying at home, you have saved lives.

Seven weeks ago the virus was spreading out of control.

Today, it is in retreat.

Those who work in our NHS have been under immense pressure – and they have responded magnificently – but the health service has not been overwhelmed in the way we feared it would be.

In the last four weeks, the number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care has fallen by almost two thirds.

And last week, we saw the most welcome sign of all.

For the first time since the epidemic started, the number of deaths registered in a single week fell.

So the progress is real and it is down to you.

But our progress is still fragile.

If we ease up too soon, the virus could run out of control again.

That would mean more people dying and all of us staying in lockdown much longer.

There will of course be risks whenever we start to ease the lockdown.

But my judgement right now is that the risk is still too great.

Too many people are still dying, and the situation in care homes – despite the extraordinary dedication of our care workers – remains a serious concern.

And the important R number – the rate at which the virus reproduces – is still uncomfortably close to one. If it exceeds one, the virus could rapidly take off again.

That is why the Scottish Government is exercising such care and caution.

We announced one change to the rules yesterday. If you want to exercise outdoors more than once a day, you can now do so.

But otherwise we are asking you to stick with lockdown for a bit longer – so that we can consolidate our progress, not jeopardise it.

Except for essential work that can't be done at home, going out for food and medicine, or for exercise – please continue to stay at home.

When you do go outside, please stay two metres from other people – and don't meet up with people from other households.

Please wear a face covering if you are in a shop or on public transport. And wash your hands thoroughly and regularly.

These measures are essential for now. But we know they cause harm of their own, so we will not keep them in place for longer than necessary.

As the infection rate continues to fall, we will gradually relax the restrictions.

And we are already making preparations for that.

We are working with businesses to produce guidance on safe workplaces.

We are working on the changes needed on public transport.

And we are talking to teachers and parents about how and when schools can safely return.

We are doing all of that carefully because it is vital that when we do ask you to return to work or to school, you have clarity about what we are asking you to do and also confidence that it is safe.

We are also expanding our ability to test people for COVID-19, and trace those they have been in contact with. That will be important to control new outbreaks.

On all of this, I will keep you informed every step of the way.

I want to make sure that as we take each step on the path to recovery, the ground beneath us is as solid as possible. But I will not keep these restrictions in place longer than necessary.

As First Minister, I know the impact this has on all of you. And as a citizen, I miss my family too.

But I won't risk unnecessary deaths by acting rashly or

prematurely.

So I am asking you please, for the moment, to continue to do what you have been doing so responsibly.

I also want to say a special thank you to children. Not being at school, or seeing your friends, or hugging your grandparents is really tough.

But you have handled it brilliantly. I'm so proud of all of you.

For all of us, I know it's getting harder but let's keep supporting each other even as we stay apart.

Let's remember what matters most – health, family, community.

Staying at home now is an expression of love, kindness and solidarity. We are doing it for each other, not just ourselves. It is how we protect each other, protect our NHS, and save lives.

And it will also bring forward that moment when we can begin a return to normality.

So once again, my thanks to each and every one of you.