

First Minister's briefing delivered today

The following is the text of the speech made by First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, at today's media briefing from St Andrew's House.

The First Minister was joined by Interim Chief Medical Officer Dr Gregor Smith and Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman.

Ms Sturgeon took questions afterwards for almost an hour on matters such as the Nike conference in Edinburgh in late February after which perhaps 8 people tested positive for Covid-19.

In addition the new symptom of loss of smell has been added to the list, and anyone over the age of five can now be tested if they have three symptoms of the virus. Testing in care homes

She also recognised it is Mental Health Awareness Week and she reported the numbers as below:

I want to start – as always – with an update you on the key statistics in relation to Covid-19.

As at 9 o'clock this morning, there have been 14,594 positive cases confirmed – which is an increase of 57 since yesterday.

A total of 1,427 patients are in hospital with Covid-19 – 1,005 of them have been confirmed as having the virus, and 422 are suspected of having it. That represents a total increase of 119 from yesterday, however the number of confirmed cases has declined by 2.

A total of 63 people last night were in intensive care with

confirmed or suspected Covid 19. That is an increase of 4 since yesterday.

I am also able to confirm today that since 5 March, a total of 3,354 patients who had tested positive have been able to leave hospital and I wish all of them well.

Unfortunately though I also have to report that in the past 24 hours, 2 deaths have been registered of patients who have been confirmed through a test as having the virus – that takes the total number of deaths in Scotland, under that measurement, to 2,105.

I should of course inject some caution into that figure – as I often say on a Monday, although deaths can now be registered at weekends, registration numbers are usually relatively low then, and they can be especially low on a Sunday. That should be taken into account when considering today's figure.

Again, let me stress – these numbers are not just statistics. Each one is an individual whose loss is a source of real sorrow and deep grief. My condolences go to everyone who has lost a loved one to this virus.

And let me also want to thank – as I always do – our health and care workers for the extraordinary work they continue to do in such difficult and challenging circumstances.

Now I have three things that I want to update on today.

The first is that we have changed our guidance on the symptoms of Covid-19, this is based on a recommendation from the Chief Medical Officers across the UK.

Until now, we have been asking people to stay at home for 7 days if you have a high temperature, or a persistent cough. That remains the case.

However we have also said that we are learning about this virus as it develops, and we now have sufficient evidence to

add an additional symptom which you should look out for.

If you notice a loss of, or change in, your sense of taste or smell – something called anosmia – that is also, or can also be, a symptom of Covid-19.

The Chief Medical Officer will say more about this in a few moments, but to summarise – if you have a high temperature, or a persistent cough, or if you notice a loss of taste or smell – stay at home completely for 7 days, and don't leave your home at all. Other people in your household should stay at home for 14 days.

The second issue I want to discuss today is that from today, we are widening the number of people who can be tested for Covid-19.

The Health Secretary will say a bit more in a moment about testing in care homes.

The change I will talk about is that anyone over the age of 5, who has any of the three symptoms of Covid-19 – including of course that loss of taste or smell – will now be able to book a test.

The tests will be available through the drive-in centres – at Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow airports, and in Perth and Inverness. They will also be available through the 12 mobile testing units which are based across the country, and which move around every 5 days or so.

Tests at drive-in centres have already been made available to over 65s, to key workers – for example people in vital infrastructure services – and to anyone who needs to work, who cannot work from home. Tests have also been available to household members of these groups.

The further expansion that we are announcing today will ensure that anyone with symptoms will be able to find out if they

have the virus, and will therefore be able to know whether or not they should be isolating.

Tests can be booked online. Priority will continue to be given to those who are key workers, and these can be secured by booking through an employer.

When you book a test, you will be allocated to the centre that is closest to your own postcode. I know that for some people that will involve travelling quite a long distance. We are currently working with the military to try to make mobile testing units as widely available as possible.

It is also worth stressing that for NHS and social care key workers, or symptomatic household members of those workers, testing should still be accessed through the NHS.

This testing ensures priority access, and should be accessible to care and health service staff at NHS facilities within their local area – it should not require people to travel long distances.

Today's expansion is the result of co-operation between NHS Scotland, the Scottish Government and the UK Government. It will help more people to know if they have the virus and it will be helpful as we build towards our strategy of test, trace, isolate and support – something that will be especially important, as we start to emerge gradually from lockdown.

That is relevant to the final issue I want to talk about today.

I can confirm today that we will publish on Thursday a routemap setting out our phased approach to easing lockdown measures.

This will take account of the up to date estimates of the transmission rate, or R number, and the number of cases. It will also take account of the latest National Records of

Scotland report, due on Wednesday, on the number of deaths from COVID.

The routemap we publish on Thursday will give a more detailed indication of the order in which we will carefully and gradually seek to lift current restrictions

Now like other countries we will not yet be able to put firm dates on all of the different phases – because timings must be driven by data and evidence.

It will also be important that we assess the impact of measures in one phase before moving on to another. We will continue, and again I want to stress this, to take a cautious approach that ensures the virus is suppressed, while seeking to restore as much normality as possible when it is safe to do so.

However, Thursday's routemap will confirm that – assuming we see progress in suppressing the virus – the first phase will start from the next formal review date of 28 May.

Within a few days of that, we will aim to allow, for example, more outdoor activity – such as being able to sit in the park, meet up outdoors with someone from another household, as long as you stay socially distanced; some limited outdoor sporting activities, like golf and fishing; the opening of garden centres and recycling facilities; and the resumption of some outdoor work.

This first phase will coincide with our ability to start, on a phased basis, a substantial test, trace and isolate operation to help us keep the virus under control as we start to ease up restrictions. That part is absolutely crucial.

Thursday's routemap will also set out our up to date assessment at that point of a phased of a return to school, as guided by the considerations of the Education Recovery Group.

From Thursday onwards, we will also set out guidance for key industries on the changes they will need to make to ensure their employees and customers are safe in advance of further changes, as well as setting out advice on travel and transport.

So, within two weeks', my hope is that we will be taking some concrete steps on the journey back to a form of normality. As I have said before, It won't be normality exactly as we knew it because the virus will not have gone away. But it will be a journey to a better balance, I hope, than the one we have today.

As we take each step, we must make sure the ground beneath us is as solid as possible.

And that's why, between now and then, sticking with the lockdown restrictions a bit longer, to suppress the virus more, is so important.

Because that will mean we can start to take these steps with confidence that we have alternative means of effectively keeping it under control.

So for that reason, our key advice now remains unchanged, and it remains as important as ever.

Please stay at home right now except for essential purposes – such as essential work that can't be done at home, exercise, or accessing essential items like food and medicine.

You can of course now exercise more than once a day – but when you do leave the house, stay more than 2 metres away from other people. And don't meet up with people from households other than yours at this stage.

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

Finally, if you or someone else in your household has symptoms, then you should stay at home completely, and a reminder – those symptoms are a high temperature, or a persistent cough, or a change or loss of smell or taste.

By sticking with these restrictions now, we make it all the more likely we can start that journey back to normality within the timescale I talked about a moment.

So let me end with my thanks again to all of you, for doing the right thing, and staying at home at this stage, you are helping to slow down the virus spread, you are helping to protect the NHS and undoubtedly you are saving lives. Thank you very much indeed, I am now going to hand over to the Chief Medical Officer to say a few words, particularly about the change to guidance on symptoms today and then I will hand over to the Health Secretary who is going to say a few words, including some more detail on testing in care homes.