

Coronavirus – First Minister warns of more restrictions ahead

At Monday's briefing on the Covid-19 pandemic, First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon was frank in explaining that there will be more restrictions within 48 hours.

Numbers of cases are on the rise and it appears that the R number is again above 1 meaning that new measures will be needed to keep the virus under control.

Last night in England the UK Government introduced measures such as a 10pm curfew in pubs and restaurants. Following the COBRA meeting today, and a meeting of the Scottish Cabinet, the First Minister is likely to make an announcement to The Scottish Parliament this afternoon.

This is what the First Minister said on Monday:

Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us today. I am joined, as you can see, by the Chief Medical Officer and the National Clinical Director, and both of them will say a few words shortly.

I will start though with the usual run-through of the daily statistics in Scotland.

I can report that the total number of positive cases reported yesterday was 255. This represents 6.3% of people newly tested and takes the total number of cases now to 24,626.

The full regional breakdown will be published later, as it always is, but I can confirm now that 103 of the new cases were in Greater Glasgow and Clyde, 47 in Lanarkshire, and 30 in Lothian.

The remaining 75 are spread across the remaining 8 mainland health boards, meaning that we have new cases again today in every mainland health board area.

I can also confirm that 73 people are in hospital – which is an increase of ten from yesterday.

And 8 people are in intensive care, which is one fewer than yesterday.

And finally, in the past 24 hours, no deaths were registered of a patient who first tested positive over the previous 28 days. It is however worth remembering that registration offices just now are closed over the weekend, so that is not surprising.

And of course since the last briefing, three additional deaths were registered on Friday, and reported in Saturday's figures.

That means that the total number of deaths, under our daily measurement, is now 2,505.

And that is again a very sharp reminder of the impact that this virus has had and the impact it is still capable of having. And I want again today to pass on my condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one throughout this pandemic, including obviously those whose loved ones' deaths have been registered in more recent days.

Now the figures I have just reported reinforce something that has been evident now over recent days. Covid is spreading

again in Scotland.

Now, because of our collective efforts over the summer, which suppressed the virus to very low levels, we are in a much stronger position than we would otherwise be – and it's important not to forget that.

Those collective efforts also meant that many people who might otherwise have succumbed to this virus didn't get it and therefore we collectively saved a lot of lives.

However, with the virus on the spread again – in Scotland, across the UK, across Europe, and indeed still accelerating in much of the world – doing nothing in the face of this quite rapid spread now is not an option.

I know that the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor for England have just given a televised briefing and Gregor and Jason may touch more on the data later on, but we would endorse the overall message that was being conveyed by Patrick Vallance and Chris Whitty.

In Scotland, as across the UK, the R number – which remember is the number of people who will on average be infected by one infectious person – is again above one, and when that happens we know that the virus will begin to spread again.

The percentage of tests which are returning positive results has been increasing. And you will have heard that through our daily reports for the last few days.

At the weekend it was above 5% across the country.

Today – with the usual caveat about single day figures – it is 6.3%, and in some health boards it is even higher than that.

In addition, new cases are not confined now to just specific clusters – they are happening cross Scotland, and in particular across mainland Scotland, and we must take all of this very seriously.

Of course, on the other side of this equation, the number of cases is not rising as quickly as it was in the spring, and the percentage of positive tests, while rising, is nowhere near as high as it was back then – back in those days it was 20% or thereabouts.

In addition, we are not yet seeing an increase in hospital admissions on anything like the same scale that we saw back in the spring.

And that is partly because the highest proportion of new cases in recent weeks has been in people under the age of 40.

However, we know that transmission in the community cannot rise indefinitely, without it starting to increasingly affect older people too. And we are now seeing an increase in the number of people admitted to hospital and in intensive care – albeit from a fairly low level. And if the number of new cases continues to rise, that rise will continue as well, and unfortunately we will also see the number of people dying increasing too.

In fact in many ways, as I indicated on Friday, the position Scotland is now in is similar to the position that for example France might have been in around 4 weeks ago.

And we don't want to reach the position that France is in now – with case levels more than 4 times higher than in Scotland, and with significant numbers of people now in hospital, intensive care, and with deaths rising.

We have of course in the last couple of weeks already taken a significant step by reducing the maximum size of household gatherings to six people, from two households.

However in my view, further and urgent action will now be needed to stop the increase in the number of cases.

I and my advisors have spent the weekend immersed in

discussion and analysis, looking at a variety of options and considering carefully the impact that we judge these would have. These discussions are continuing throughout today, but we are very close to a point of decision.

And, at the heart of this decision is a simple truth: the longer we wait to introduce new measures, the longer these measures are likely to be in place.

If we move sharply now to get the virus back under control, we can minimise the time we all spend under any new restrictions.

If we wait, it will take longer – potentially a lot longer – to come out of the other side.

For that reason, as I indicated on Friday, we are preparing to introduce a package of additional measures with the intention of bringing the R number back below 1.

Now ideally, at least some of these decisions will be taken on a four nations basis, across the UK.

We all of course have our individual responsibilities and we will perhaps take decisions that are not entirely identical. But given that the virus does not respect borders, alignment if possible does make sense. And of course it is the UK Government that holds the financial levers necessary to mitigate the economic impact of any measures.

That's why I asked on Friday for an urgent Cobra meeting – and repeated that call over the weekend. That call has been echoed in Wales and London.

I am therefore pleased that in a four nations call with Michael Gove on Saturday he confirmed that a Cobra will take place, although it is frustrating that we still don't have a precise time for that and indeed don't even have confirmation yet of whether that will take place today or tomorrow.

I am however talking directly to the Prime Minister

immediately after this press conference, and hopefully we will have greater clarity from that discussion.

In that call I will impress upon the Prime Minister my view that we need decisive, urgent, and – as far as possible given our individual responsibilities – coordinated action across the UK.

And I will be clear that I am willing to allow a bit more time for four nations discussions to take place before reaching final decisions for Scotland, but I be equally clear that the urgency of this situation means that we cannot, must not and will not wait too long.

The Scottish Cabinet will meet tomorrow to take stock. And I am very clear that it must be in a position to decide the way ahead for Scotland within the next 48 hours.

And I need to be absolutely straight with people across Scotland that additional restrictions will almost certainly be put in place in Scotland over the next couple of days.

Hopefully this will be with four nations alignment, but if necessary it will have to happen without that.

I intend to make a full statement to parliament later this week – tomorrow or Wednesday I hope – to outline the steps that the Government has decided are necessary and to set out the rationale for them.

Whatever else we decide, one thing I want to confirm today is that our package of measures will include plans to better support people who are being advised to self-isolate.

Self-isolation is a key tool in our fight against this virus – it helps us break the chains of transmission – so we must make it as possible as we can for people to abide by that advice.

We have, and will continue to consider, whether the UK

Government approach of imposing potentially large fines for non-compliance with self-isolation is appropriate. But, while we will keep enforcement options under review, we do have a concern about potential disincentives of fines and enforcement to people getting tested.

Our view is that it is better to remove barriers to self-isolation. I believe that people understand the need to keep others safe and may want to do so, but they need to be supported through these difficult circumstances.

So I can confirm today that we will be putting in place a financial support package to help people – particularly those on low incomes – who face a loss of income if they are required isolate.

Nobody should be forced to choose between self-isolating for the collective good, and paying their rent and feeding their families. If that's the choice that people face, then it shouldn't be a surprise to us that compliance levels will be lower than we need them to be.

Now, the details of that package are being worked through at present, and we also await information from the UK Government on additional Barnett consequential as a result of announcements made by them over the weekend.

The last thing that I wanted to touch on briefly today, given that I mentioned this on Friday, is that on Friday I indicated that I would confirm today whether we were going to exempt children under 12 from the current two household rule – as you'll recall children under 12 don't count towards the limit of six but do count towards the two households.

However, given the more fundamental decisions may well be taken this week I've decided to consider this issue in that wider context and I will cover it in the statement I make to Parliament later in the week.

Now I'm going to hand over to the Chief Medical Officer and to the National Clinical Director in a moment. But I want to end by stressing two things.

First, this is a serious moment again for the country. We cannot allow cases to continue rising. Those who say that we should just allow this virus to do what it does – the so-called 'herd immunity' argument – I don't agree with that.

We know this virus can take life, particularly of older and vulnerable people, but we also know this virus can have serious health implications for younger, healthier people. It's not a virus we can be complacent about allowing people to get. So this is a moment for us to take action.

But secondly, and it's a point I made earlier on, we must understand that we are in a different and better position than we were in March. Cases are not rising as fast, we have a better idea of the settings which pose the main risk of transmission, and Test and Protect – despite the volume of cases we've had recently – is managing well.

And because of this – and despite the temptations for shorthand – we shouldn't frame the decisions we face this week in the language of lockdown or not lockdown. Implementing further measures now is very much, I hope, about controlling this virus while avoiding the need for another full-scale lockdown of the type that we had to impose in March.

And lastly, let's not forget that all of us have the ability to make a difference now. None of us as individuals are powerless in the face of this virus. We can make choices and decisions which increase our own chances of staying safe, and which also help to keep people around us safe as well.

So please, I'm asking everybody to think carefully about what you can do as an individual to play your part in this collective action that we need to take – which Scotland is only one country of many across the globe that are having to

consider these actions.

So please, work from home if you are able to do so. It has been and continues to be the Scottish Government advice to work from home if it is possible. We are not, and haven't, been advising you to go back to the office if you are able to work from home.

Secondly, download the Protect Scotland app. That seems like a small thing to do but it is a really powerful thing to do because it helps us widen the net of people who can be contacted and advised to self-isolate if they have been exposed to this virus.

More than a million people have downloaded it already – it can make a difference at those levels, but it will make a bigger difference if more of us do it.

Thirdly, limit your travel and social interactions as much as you reasonably can.

The current rules on gatherings – six people, from two households – see that as a maximum. Limit how many people you see in one day or over a small number of days.

And of course, if you live in Glasgow; East or West Dunbartonshire; Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire; North or South Lanarkshire right now, please don't visit other households at all.

And finally, when you are meeting and interacting with other people – which we all have to do to some extent notwithstanding that need to limit it – when you are interacting, please remember to follow the FACTS advice. If we all follow these five golden rules, we minimise and limit the opportunities the virus has to transmit from person to person, or household to household. So please, remember::

- the F – wear Face coverings in enclosed spaces

- the A is Avoid crowded places – wherever they might be, indoors or outdoors
- C – Clean your hands regularly, clean hard surfaces that you're touching
- T – keep Two metres distance from people in other households
- and S – Self isolate, and book a test, if you have symptoms.

If we all do all of these things then we are all individually helping this collective effort to keep this virus under control, and allow us to retain as much normality in our lives, notwithstanding the restrictions all countries are having to operate in right now as we possibly can.

My thanks again to everybody for joining us, please spread the word that you hear at these briefings as widely as you possibly can.

I'm going to ask the Chief Medical Officer to say a few words now, then the National Clinical Director, and then as normal we will take questions but we wanted to make sure that you heard – not just from me today – but from the Government's chief clinical advisors as well.