

Coronavirus – Christmas arrangements agreed

Late this afternoon all four UK governments have agreed what will happen in December.

This will be a cautious and limited relaxation of the rules on household meetings in an effort to support people over the Christmas period. While these rules have been agreed the First Minister said earlier at Holyrood: “I know that everyone has a desire to see loved ones over the festive period; however, there is also a very real and legitimate anxiety that doing so could put those we love at risk, set back our progress as a country and result in unnecessary deaths and suffering.

“That would always be a worry, but it is perhaps especially acute when we also know that we might be within weeks of being able to vaccinate a significant proportion of the population. The arrangements that we put in place for the festive period will seek to balance those concerns. Any easing of restrictions will be temporary, limited and accompanied by advice on the precautions that we should take to minimise risk. We will continue to ask people to err on the side of caution.

“Our overall advice will be for people to use any flexibility carefully and only if they believe it right and necessary for their personal circumstances.”

A maximum of three households are to be able to meet in a “bubble” during a few days over the festive period and the rules will apply to all countries in the UK.

Households will be able to travel between local authorities and between the four nations during December 23 and 27 to form a bubble, and must only join one bubble. (*It really should be a Christmas bauble it has to be said.*)

The five-day period will provide time for travel, and for those who may have to work over Christmas. Households are not required to use all five days and should keep visits to no more than one or two days if possible.

Confirming the plans, the First Minister said it is clear that there is a risk inherent in any relaxation of the restrictions and asked everyone to consider very carefully whether the opportunity to mix for a few days is necessary given the risk of spreading the virus.

Ms Sturgeon said: "We know that for some, contact with friends and family is crucial during this time as isolation and loneliness can hit people especially hard over the Christmas period. The "bubble" approach aims to reduce this impact.

"But we must be clear, there cannot be any further relaxation of measures for Hogmanay. Even this short relaxation will give the virus a chance to spread. Our priority is to suppress transmission of Covid-19 and reduce the risk to the vulnerable and those who have spent so long shielding – and that involves abiding by the rules.

"Just because you can mix with others indoors over this time, that doesn't mean you have to. If you choose to stick with the rules as they are, then you will be continuing the hard work to beat this virus and prevent its spread."

The approach about the Christmas bubbles includes:

- a "bubble" should be formed household to household only (i.e. different people in a household should not pick their own bubble)
- between 23 and 27 December 2020, people can meet in an

- exclusive “bubble” composed of three households
- you should stay with your “bubble” where they are hosting you and you should follow the travel advice for the level you are in (e.g. people being hosted in a level 3 area cannot go on an outing to a level 2 area)
 - within your “bubble”, you can gather in a home, an outdoor place or a place of worship
 - in all other settings – eg. hospitality, entertainment venues – those who have formed a bubble must only socialise with members of their own household
 - households deciding to form a bubble will be advised to limit social contact before and after the period of relaxation

More detailed guidance will be announced in the next few days.