

Coronavirus – new Levels of protection announced for local authority areas

The Scottish Government has announced on Tuesday that more than two million people who have been living under the strictest Covid-19 protection level for three weeks will have restrictions eased on Friday.

This follows improvement in the number of new cases in recent weeks in the 11 Level 4 local authority areas which will now drop down to Level 3.

Overall, half of all Scotland's local authorities will move down a level this coming Friday, but the City of Edinburgh Council area has remained in Level Three for at least one more week. The First Minister said that the Scottish cabinet had 'agonised' over this decision this morning.

The First Minister told The Scottish Parliament: "The fall in infection rates in these areas – the most highly populated in the country – have contributed to an improvement in the situation across Scotland as a whole. All of this puts us in a much better position to cope with the inevitable difficulties of winter.

"However, it does not remove the need for a cautious approach. The risks and challenges of the next few months are clear.

“That is why, in reaching decisions today, we have had to consider the potential overall impact of moving to a lower level of restrictions at the same time as the Christmas period begins in earnest.”

The First Minister also announced that Angus, Inverclyde and Falkirk will drop a level going from 3 to 2.

Finally, Dumfries and Galloway and Borders Councils will drop to Level 1, following significant improvements in suppressing the virus in these two areas.

All other areas remain unchanged in their levels.

The easing of restrictions will happen from 6pm on Friday, 11 December.

However, retail outlets in areas dropping down to Level 3 can re-open from 6am on Friday in a move intended to help stores and shopping centres better manage the flow of customers after the period of closure.

The First Minister stressed that travel restrictions remain in place and no-one in a Level 3 area, or – until Friday – a Level 4 area, should travel outside their local authority area, except for essential purposes.

There will also be an easing of restrictions on gathering in homes for islands communities which are not linked by road to the mainland. Up to six people from a maximum of two households will be allowed to meet in private homes in Level 1 island communities. Islands with road links to the mainland, however, will not be included in this relaxation.

The assessment of what level of protection should be applied to each local authority is broadly based on an analysis of five key indicators:

- number of positive COVID-19 cases per hundred thousand people over the last week

- percentage of positive tests
- forecast for new cases in the weeks ahead
- capacity of local hospitals
- capacity of local intensive care facilities

These factors are assessed alongside the advice and recommendations of local public health officials, National Incident Management Team, the Scottish Government's chief clinical and policy advisors, and consideration of local circumstances, such as: specific COVID-19 outbreaks; travel and work patterns; and the extent to which health services are provided by neighbouring health boards. Final decisions are based on all of these factors.

Alongside a table setting out the levels, a detailed analysis paper has also been published setting out the Scottish Government's assessment and overall decision for each local authority.

Find out more about the [COVID protection levels](#) and what you can and cannot do at each level.

The five-level strategic framework aims to tackle COVID-19 with measures strong enough to reduce virus prevalence while proportionate to the scale of the problem in different parts of the country – and in a way that minimises, as far as possible, the other harms caused by the pandemic.

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Meeting others indoors

You should not meet anyone who is not in your household indoors in your home or in their home. This applies to all age groups 12 and over. You can meet another household indoors in a public place such as a café or restaurant. The maximum number of people who can meet indoors in a public (not a home) place are 6 which can be from up to 2 separate households.

Children under the age of 12 from these households do not count towards the total number of people counted in a gathering.

Where an individual household includes more than 6 people, they can nevertheless meet as a single household even if the total number of people exceeds 6.

When you meet people from another household indoors you should:

minimise the number of meetings you have with people from other households each day

stay at least 2 metres apart from anyone who is not part of your household, unless in a public venue that is operating 1 metre distancing with additional measures being in place to avoid transmission.

maintain hand and cough hygiene

avoid touching hard surfaces with your hands

wash your hands when you arrive, when you leave, when you get home and especially before eating or after touching surfaces

not share food or utensils – if eating, each household should bring, prepare and eat its own food separately

if possible, keep rooms well ventilated – consider opening windows or a door

Those at a higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus (including those who had been shielding, people 70 and over, people who are pregnant and people with an underlying medical condition) should strictly follow the physical distancing guidance.

Meeting others outdoors

You can meet people from other households outdoors in a private garden or in a public place such as a park or an outdoor area of a pub. The maximum number of people who can meet outdoors is 6 which can be from up to 2 separate households.

Children under the age of 12 from these households do not count towards the total number of people counted in a gathering. Children under 12 do not need to maintain physical distance from others. This is to allow children under 12 to play with their friends outside.

Young people aged between 12 and 17 can meet up in groups of up to 6 at a time outdoors and are not subject to the 2 household limit. Physical distancing is required.

Where an individual household includes more than 6 people, they can continue to meet outside as a household even if the total number of people exceeds 6.

You should:

minimise the number of meetings you have with people from other households each day

stay at least 2 metres away from anyone who is not part of your household

maintain hand and cough hygiene

avoid touching hard surfaces with your hands

wash your hands when you arrive, when you leave, when you get home and especially before eating or after touching surfaces

not share food or utensils – if eating, each household should bring, prepare and eat its own food separately

if possible, keep rooms well ventilated – consider opening windows or a door

Those at a higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus (including those who had been shielding, people 70 and over, people who are pregnant and people with an underlying medical condition) should strictly follow the physical distancing guidance.

Going into someone else's home

If you are meeting people from another household in their garden and the gathering exceeds 6 people, you should only go into their house to:

access the garden – do so quickly and without touching anything

use the toilet – avoid touching surfaces with your hands as much as possible, wipe any surfaces that you do touch with antibacterial wipes, wash your hands thoroughly, dry your hands with a freshly laundered towel or a paper towel, which you should dispose of in a closed bin.

If members of another household are going to visit you and might need to use your toilet, you should ensure appropriate cleaning materials are available. You should also provide either a hand towel for each visiting household or paper towels and a safe disposal option.

Extended households

People who live in different places can form an “extended household” in the following circumstances:

People who live alone

If you are an adult and you live alone, or if all others in your household are under 18, you, any children who live with you, and the members of one other household (of any size) can agree to form an ‘extended household’. This will allow people who live alone (or those living only with children under the age of 18) to be considered part of another household in order to reduce loneliness, isolation and to provide mutual social support.

Couples who do not live together

Two adults are in a relationship and they do not live together they, and any children they each live with, can agree to form an ‘extended household’.

However, if one member of a household gets coronavirus, there is a strong likelihood that other members of that household will also catch it. For this reason, there are some important rules that extended households should follow to remain as safe as possible:

a household must not form an extended household with more than one other household

households can end the arrangement at any time, but should not then form an extended household with a new household for at least a 14-day period.

All the adults living in both households should agree to form the extended household. We also encourage parents or guardians to involve their children in discussions. Forming an extended household is an important decision that should be properly discussed and agreed beforehand. Physical distancing between members of an extended household is not required

Once two households have agreed to form an extended household they may meet outdoors or indoors, visit and stay at each other's homes, and do everything that people in other households can do, such as watch TV, share a meal and look after each other's children.

Members of an extended household are considered to be one household for the legal requirements on meeting other households and going outside, and for the guidance in this document about seeing friends and family and about exercise and leisure activity.

You can continue to interact with members of your extended household even if they live in a different area with a different Level of protective measures.

If someone in the extended household develops COVID-19 symptoms, to avoid spreading the virus all members of the extended household must isolate immediately if they met the symptomatic person at any time between 2 days before and up to 10 days after their symptoms started.

If the symptomatic person tests positive, all members of their direct household must isolate for 14 days from the start of symptoms. Similarly, other members of the extended household must isolate for 14 days from when the most recent contact took place. Isolate means staying in your own home for the full 14 days.

Those at a higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus (including people over 70, people who are pregnant and people with an underlying medical condition) may take part in an extended household arrangement, but should strictly follow the handwashing, surface cleaning and respiratory hygiene guidance on the NHS Inform website.

Shared parenting

Where parents do not live in the same household, children can move between their parents' homes in all levels, this includes both supervised and unsupervised visitation.

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Restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars can open indoor and outdoors for the consumption of food and non alcoholic drinks. Alcoholic drinks cannot be served. Last entry is 17:00 and all venues must be closed and all customers off the premises by 18:00.

The maximum number of people you can meet indoors and outdoors in a restaurant, café, pub or bar is 6 which can be from up to 2 separate households.

Children under the age of 12 from these households do not count towards the total number of people meeting outdoors only.

Where an individual household includes more than 6 people they can continue to meet as a household in hospitality premises, although the venue may impose a smaller group limit.

Table service and the wearing of face-coverings (unless exempt) when not seated by all customers is mandatory in all hospitality venues. When meeting people from more than one other household, you should think beforehand about what size

of table you will need to keep physically distanced between members of your group. The venue you are visiting should be able to advise you of booking options.

You will be asked by to provide your contact details for Test and Protect purposes This information is retained for 21 days with a view to sharing with Test and Protect Teams, if required.

Hospitality venues are required to put in place additional measures to minimise transmission of COVID-19. For example hand sanitiser stations and adequate ventilation. There will also be signs to inform customers whether the venue is in a 2 metres or 1 metre social distancing area.

You should stay at least 2 metres apart from people from other households at all times, unless the venue is operating 1 metre distancing due to additional measures being in place to avoid transmission. Physical distancing and good hand hygiene remain the most effective measures in reducing the transmission of COVID-19. Therefore, distancing requirements need to be maintained, where reasonably practicable, at all times, including when waiting to enter premises and when seated.

You should avoid visiting multiple hospitality premises on the same day. In particular, do not visit more than one pub or bar on the same day, as this increases the risk of transmission.

Takeaways can still operate as normal, provided food and drink is sold for consumption off the premises. Face coverings and physical distancing rules must be followed.

Hotels and other accommodation providers can still serve food to guests staying in their premises up to 22:00. Room service, including alcohol, is allowed as normal.

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