

Coronavirus – relaxation of restrictions limited to Christmas Day

The Scottish Government has announced that the relaxation of restrictions over the Christmas period is being reined back.

Scotland will significantly tighten protections against Covid-19 to prevent the spread of the new, highly contagious strain of the virus.

Following confirmation that the new variant of Covid-19 spreads substantially more quickly, the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced that Scotland needs to act now.

She held a media briefing earlier.

To keep people safe, Ms Sturgeon announced today:

- the planned easing of restrictions around Christmas will be limited to Christmas Day itself, and not the previous five day window that was planned
- legal household limits will still apply – a maximum of 8 people from 3 households – however advice is to minimise the numbers. Where possible, people should celebrate the festive period at home in their own household and meet with others outdoors
- other than for specific exemptions, travel between Scotland and the rest of the UK will not be legal
- travel within Scotland will be allowed on Christmas Day
- from Boxing Day, all of Scotland will have Level 4

restrictions applied, including the closure of non-essential retail and hospitality. The only exceptions will be Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and the other island communities where restrictions have been reduced in recent weeks, who will be placed in Level 3

- from Boxing Day, in line with existing law, travel across local authority boundaries between areas in Level 3 or 4 will not be legal other than for specific exempt purposes

The First Minister also set out new plans for the return of schools in the New Year. Teachers will return to work as planned and children of key workers and the most vulnerable children, will return to schools as planned.

For the majority of pupils the holiday period will be extended until 11 January 2021 and learning will begin online from then until at least 18 January 2021.

All these measures will be kept under regular review.

The First Minister said:“Last week it was confirmed that a new variant of the virus had been identified in the UK, and I advised Parliament that a small number of cases of it had already been identified in Scotland.

“While further analysis is required to establish this one way or another, we already have a concern that this strain may be driving what appears to be faster transmission in some hospitals and care homes.

“That’s why we have decided to act and to act firmly.

“Firstly, we are asking everyone to redouble your personal efforts in sticking to the rules and following FACTS.

“Secondly, we intend to maintain a strict travel ban between Scotland and the rest of the UK. This will remain in place throughout the festive period. We simply cannot risk more of

this strain entering the country if we can possibly avoid it.

“Thirdly, we now intend to change the law to allow mixing indoors in a bubble on Christmas Day only. The household limits will still apply – a maximum of 8 people from 3 households – is the law. But the advice will be to minimise numbers as far as possible.

“My message is stay home, stay safe and enjoy Christmas. That is in your own interest and the interest of everyone you love.”

Speaking about beyond Christmas, the First Minister said: “To limit, as far as we can, the risk of this strain spreading further than it has within Scotland, we intend to apply Level 4 measures to all of mainland Scotland for a period of three weeks from one minute after midnight on Boxing Day morning.

“The only exceptions will be Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and the other island communities where we have reduced restrictions in recent weeks, who will go into Level 3 but with strict restrictions on who can travel to and from those islands.

“The situation the new strain presents means that until we are sure it is firmly under control – until we are sure we are not facing the same situation as the south of England today faces, we must slightly change our plans for the way our schools work.

“Schools still open next week will close as planned – we are not changing that. They were then due to reopen from 5 January with all councils areas back by the 7.

“Instead of that, here is what we are now going to do – for the children of key workers – such as nurses in our hospitals – schools will open and stay open as normal. They will also open as normal for the most vulnerable children. All teachers will also return to work as scheduled and planned. For the majority

of pupils, however, the holidays are being extended until 11 January. Starting on that date, learning will be online until at least 18 January.

“After that, assuming we are confident we have the virus under control we will aim to reopen schools more fully but at least until then, schools will go online only other than for the children of key workers and the most vulnerable.”

Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross said: “Families across Scotland will be devastated at these new measures, especially so close to Christmas.

“However, given the rapidly increasing spread of the virus across the UK, and until our scientists know more about the transmission of this new variant, it is understandable why these restrictions are necessary at this time.

“None of us want this, but these sacrifices will save lives.

“We would expect the Scottish Government to ensure a return to regional levels of restrictions as soon as it is safe to do so.”

Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard said: “The Scottish Government must make decisions based on public health advice and solid evidence.

“To win public confidence behind this significant tightening of restrictions requires persuasive evidence to be published, transparency and openness, and a substantial rise in testing, otherwise not only will there be disappointment there will be a heightened risk of non-compliance.”

Scottish Greens co-leader Patrick Harvie said: “It’s clear that the increase in cases linked to a new strain are very concerning indeed. For weeks Scottish Greens have been raising the concerns of public health experts that the planned relaxation of restrictions would lead to a significant rise in

infections of COVID-19, so in the face of an even more transmissible strain this extra caution from the First Minister is necessary.

“If this is going to work, we need to step up the support for people self-isolating, especially for those on insecure income. This means widening the criteria for receiving financial support and offering accommodation where it is urgently needed.

“The staggered school return is also a sensible approach, one we had already been advocating. But it must be accompanied by the regular, routine COVID testing in schools which Parliament has voted for and which teachers are demanding, and clinically vulnerable staff must not be forced to put their lives on the line by coming into schools.

“Many people will be baffled that the Government is still insisting on opening schools for two days this week, and I would urge local authorities to close early to keep staff, pupils and communities safe.

“Pressures on the NHS are already on the rise, as it deals with winter workload and the roll out of the vaccine. The last thing we all need is for a surge in cases, just as we can see light at the end of the tunnel. Gatherings of friends and family will be all the more sweeter when this is all over.”

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie said: “When the science speaks in such stark terms, the leadership of the country must listen and act. Shutting down mainland Scotland for three weeks will have a great impact on people’s lives, but it is the response that is necessary to match this new threat.

“However, the Scottish Government should act earlier by closing schools next week. The new strain of the virus is already here and pupils and teachers who are infected in school next week could pass it onto vulnerable relatives on

Christmas Day. Let's be safe and close the schools early."

Rhea Wolfson of the GMB Scotland Women's Campaigns Unit said: "The Scottish Government can't wait until mid-January to roll out workplace testing for home carers – they need to find a way to bring this forward immediately.

"We can't have 14,000 home carers in Scotland, supported only with PPE, working through a lockdown prompted by a more transmissible strain of COVID-19.

"Failure to act now to protect these key workers and their service users would be an exacerbation of the negligence they have already endured."

[su_spoiler class="my-custom-spoiler" title="Level 4 Meeting others indoors"] You should not meet anyone who is not in your household indoors in your home or in their home. You can meet another household indoors in a public place. The maximum number of people who can meet indoors in a public (not a home) place 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 permitted to gather indoors in a public place but do count towards the maximum of 2 households permitted to meet. For example a children's party with 10 children from more than 2 separate households would not be allowable, but 6 adults and 4 children from 2 households could meet.

Children under 12 do not need to maintain physical distance from others indoors.

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.

You can go into another household to provide care and support for a vulnerable person. This can include providing emotional

support for someone whose wellbeing is at risk, including for those who are isolated because of disability or a caring situation. Read Coronavirus (COVID-19): advice for unpaid carers

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.

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[su_spoiler class="my-custom-spoiler" title="Level 4 Hospitality"] Restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars will be closed. Sectors guidance is at: [sector guidance for tourism](#)

and hospitality

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

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

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[su_spoiler class="my-custom-spoiler" title="Level 4 Accommodation"] All holiday accommodation is closed to tourism. Hotels, B&Bs and self-catering can remain open for essential customers only:

anyone who is using that accommodation for work purposes

anyone who requires accommodation to attend a funeral

anyone who is providing accommodation or support services to the homeless

anyone who uses that accommodation as their main residence

anyone who needs accommodation while moving home

anyone who is unable to return to their main residence

anyone who requires accommodation to attend a marriage ceremony or civil partnership registration

anyone who requires accommodation to participate in or facilitate shared parenting arrangements

When providing accommodation to workers, this should only be open for essential workers who require accommodation as part of their role. Workers accommodation guidance.

Breaching the restrictions in the Regulations is a criminal offence, unless you have a “reasonable excuse” for doing so. This means that accommodation providers may offer

accommodation to customers in other circumstances provided it is an essential purpose. An example of this would be where someone needs accommodation for an essential hospital visit.

In line with Competition and Markets Authority guidance, a full refund should be offered to customers who booked holiday homes, but could not stay in them due to lockdown restrictions. The regulation of consumer protection is the responsibility of the UK Government at Westminster. The Competition and Markets Authority has issued guidance to businesses and consumers about refunds

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[su_spoiler class="my-custom-spoiler" title="Level 4 travel and transport"]You must not travel into or out of Level 3 and 4 local authority areas except for essential reasons. See further guidance on travel and transport and view maps of local authority area boundaries.

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