

First Minister questioned over Christmas holidays

At First Minister's Questions today it was all about Christmas and coronavirus.

It may only be 1 December, but according to a COSLA document leaked to The Daily Record last week the government may be considering extending the Christmas holidays into January 2021, with some remote learning set up then. It is possible that the government may set the Christmas school holidays start date at 18 December 2020.

Ruth Davidson the Conservative MSP for Central Edinburgh who stands in for Scottish Conservative Leader, Douglas Ross who is an MP at Westminster, challenged First Minister Nicola Sturgeon over what she called the "information vacuum".

Ms Davidson, said: "With around two weeks until most schools are due to close for the Christmas holidays, parents and teachers are stuck in limbo thanks to the SNP government.

"It is wrong that parents only discover school holidays may be significantly extended due to a leaked document. It's just as wrong for the government to then stay silent.

"The First Minister's answers in parliament today were simply not good enough. She must come clean and tell families what is happening.

"Some key workers face a possible childcare crisis in little over a fortnight. This information vacuum is causing anxiety and concern for parents across Scotland.

“In the real world, they need to make childcare plans and speak with their employers. They need answers now – not just dropped on them at the last minute when it’s convenient for the SNP.”

In today’s statement to Holyrood the First Minister also confirmed that The City of Edinburgh Council area will remain in Level Three, and that all other 31 council areas will remain in the same levels too. But she warned that the government has concerns over Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and public health officials are keeping an eye on the numbers there.

Those areas in Level 4 will remain so until 11 December, but it is likely that there may be some changes to other areas when the government reviews the restrictions next Tuesday.

In her statement today, the First Minister suggested areas currently at Tier 4 may be lifted in mid December, with plans for a five-day relaxation to allow families to expand their bubbles to celebrate Christmas in common with all other countries in the UK.

Ms Sturgeon said: “The sacrifices everyone is making are making a difference. They are getting case numbers down, reducing the numbers getting ill and needing hospital care and so protecting the NHS, and saving lives.

“That said, the level of the virus overall – and this is particularly the case in some parts of the country – is still higher than we need it to be.

“There are still pressures on the health service – and any increase in rates of infection would intensify those. As we go into the deeper winter period, there are a number of factors that may well push transmission up again. And so we could see cases and resulting illness and deaths start to rise again.

“That means we have an interest in driving cases as low as we

can now. And that necessitates continued caution.”

Scottish Greens co-leader Patrick Harvie who joined the session at Holyrood remotely, said: “Any relaxation of the rules must be done with a level of caution and with the clearest guidelines possible, in order to prevent the kind of January surge in cases that the experts are warning us about.

“Even in current circumstances, there are people at risk. Constituents of mine in Glasgow have said that they have been sent out by employers to do sales work door to door, even in Tier 4 restrictions. This is just the latest example of employers failing to keep their staff safe and secure from this deadly virus.

“It’s clear more must be done to prevent employers putting their staff at risk.”