

Coronavirus – coming out of lockdown

In a media briefing on Tuesday, the First Minister announced some relaxations on Covid-19 restrictions.

Ms Sturgeon announced that restrictions on travelling around Scotland, between different local authority areas, would be lifted on Friday 16 April. But there is a caveat – people must not stay overnight when they do.

People may also meet up in groups of up to six adults from six different households outdoors from then or six people from up to two households indoors. People must continue to Stay Local for other purposes such as non-essential shopping, and public transport capacity will continue to be limited.

If data permits, the whole of Scotland, including all island communities, will then be in Level 3 from Monday 26 April. This will mean:

- non-essential travel between Scotland, England and Wales will be permitted, and tourist accommodation in Scotland can reopen subject to socialising rules
- shops will be able to fully reopen with precautions including physical distancing requirements, face masks and hand sanitiser in place
- gyms and indoor sports facilities, including swimming pools, will reopen for individual exercise, with group activities permitted for under-18s, and all organised outdoor activity can resume except adult contact sport

- limits on attendance at life events, including weddings, civil partnerships, funerals and receptions for those will increase to 50, with alcohol permitted
- pubs, cafes and restaurants will reopen outdoors for groups of up to six people from up to six households with alcohol in line with local licencing laws, and indoors for groups of up to six people from up to two households without alcohol until 20:00
- takeaways will be able to resume normal service, with physical distancing and face masks in premises
- mobile close contact services such as hairdressers, barbers and beauty salons can resume
- non-essential work in other people's homes will resume

We have full details of all the protection levels at the foot of this article.



Chief Medical Officer, Dr Gregor Smith at the Covid-19 press conference PHOTO © The Scottish Government

She explained that virtually all over 60-year-olds have received at least the first dose of the vaccine, and so too have 96% of 55 to 59-year-olds and 84% of 50 to 54-year-olds.

The First Minister said: "Overall we have now given a first dose to almost 60% of the whole adult population and we have now effectively met our target of offering a first dose by the middle of this month to everyone over 50, all unpaid carers and all adults with particular underlying health conditions. Significantly, these groups account for 99% of all Covid related deaths so that is quite a significant milestone."

The changes being made from this Friday recognise the consistently falling infection rates in Scotland – daily infections have dropped by 85% since early January – as well as the positive impact such measures will have on people's mental health.

In addition, the First Minister confirmed that restrictions on

travel from England and Wales are expected to be lifted from 26 April, along with easing of rules elsewhere, including the reopening of shops, pubs and restaurants, on a restricted basis.

Hospitality businesses will have to close at 8.00pm indoors and 10.00pm outdoors with alcohol only served outside.

Ms Sturgeon said: "We may see some limited travel restrictions, but from 26 April people in Scotland can travel anywhere across Britain.

"International travel remains a significant risk. It may well be the case that we have to endure restrictions on international travel for some time longer."

She said: "Because the data in the last two weeks in particular has been encouraging, we are now in a position to give a bit more certainty to individuals and businesses about the way ahead, and accelerate one aspect of the exit from lockdown which I think is important for our personal wellbeing.

"First of all, although of course we will continue to monitor the data, we are now extremely confident that those parts of the country currently in Level Four will move to Level Three on 26 April – now less than two weeks away. That means, amongst other things, that on that date shops will fully reopen, pubs, cafés and restaurants will also be able to fully open outdoors on 26 April and indeed, able to open indoors on that date, albeit on a restricted basis. It is worth noting that the restricted indoor opening of hospitality on 26th will be actually three weeks ahead of any indoor opening of hospitality in England."

Ms Sturgeon then spoke of the island communities. She said: "Several of our islands including Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles are already in Level Three. That partly reflects the fact that they have had lower rates of Covid than the

mainland, although there have been outbreaks – which again shows the need for caution even in our remoter communities, and on our islands.

“I set out previously that we would consult with island communities about whether from 26 April they wanted to move down to Level Two. The data would justify that, even although that would necessitate keeping travel restrictions to and from the mainland in place to avoid the risk of cases being imported to and spreading within the islands.

“Alternatively whether they preferred to stay at Level Three with the rest of the country for a further three weeks to enable the lifting of travel restrictions and the opening of tourism and hospitality to visitors. I think it’s fair to say there’s no universal opinion here.

“I know that neither option will please everybody. Based on the balance of opinion we have decided on the latter option, aligning islands with the rest of the country for a period so that travel, and therefore parts of the economy, that so many islanders rely on can operate more normally.”

Also from 26 April premises including shops, gyms, pubs and restaurants are due to reopen on a restricted basis. Further restrictions will be lifted from 17 May and up to four people from two households can meet up indoors from then. Pubs will then be open until 22.30 and contact sports, cinemas and some events will be allowed.



Edinburgh City Chambers. Photo: © 2020, Martin P. McAdam
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The City of Edinburgh Council Leader Adam McVey said: “I know people across the city will be extremely pleased with the First Minister’s latest COVID update, as am I. So many residents will now be able to visit loved ones in other parts of the country, who they may not have seen for many months, or to gather with more friends and families outdoors, which I

know will have such a positive impact on everyone's wellbeing.

"We've all worked so hard over the winter to stick to restrictions, and I know many businesses have had to make real sacrifices to help limit the spread of this virus, so once again I want to thank everyone for their efforts to protect one another during this most challenging of years.

"Of course, with infection rates dropping and an ongoing rapid roll-out of vaccinations, there is much to be hopeful about as we stay on-track in our recovery from the pandemic. But, while some of our freedoms are gradually being returned, there's no room for complacency. There are still rules in place, for good reason, and we must continue to observe these with care if we are to return to the normality that we've missed so much, sooner rather than later."

Depute Leader Cammy Day said: "Today's news is to be welcomed and recognises the real need for us to be able to spend more time with family and friends, something I know we have all felt the lack of over recent months. Lifting of travel restrictions from England and Wales later this month is also a really positive step for all those missing relatives and friends around the country and will be a huge benefit to all the hospitality businesses and accommodation providers who are looking forward to welcoming visitors back.

"Now, we need to set our sights on recovering safely and sustainably. Though the latest update gives us reason to be optimistic, and will allow us to enjoy spring with one another, we still need to work together to get through this. By following the guidance in place around physical distancing, meeting outdoors and continuing good hygiene – as well as looking after our parks and outdoor spaces when we do gather – we can emerge from this healthy and happy."



Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar. Photo: © 2021 Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar said: “These changes are a welcome announcement to many who have been separated from loved ones for so long.” “But we need to ensure that this lockdown is our last. “We need to continue, and improve the pace of, the vaccine roll out and ensure the testing and tracing infrastructure is in place to support a return to normal.” “Our ability to make these changes ahead of schedule is a tribute to Scotland’s vaccinators and our health and care staff.” “I’d also like to thank every person who has made sacrifices in this long year.” “By observing the rules you have played your part in ensuring our exit is moving with pace.” “But while this news is welcome, we must ensure that the promise that all over 50s and the JCVI priority list would be vaccinated by mid-April is met.” “There are still concerning regional variations, for example across NHS Lothian only 76.1% of those aged 50-54 have had their first dose compared to the national average of 82.6%.” “This – and the promised twice-weekly testing for Scots – will be essential in making this lockdown our last.”



Scottish Conservative party leader, Douglas Ross. Photo: © 2021 Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross said: “Nicola Sturgeon appears to have listened to what we and others have been saying about Scotland’s slow emergence from lockdown.

“After the cruel false dawn of the previous easing of restrictions and seeing other parts of the world plunged into a third lockdown, we cannot afford to get this wrong.

“But the data clearly suggests it is safe to move more quickly and with greater optimism.

“Scotland’s hospitality sector is on its knees and that is compounded by seeing equivalent businesses across the border reopening sooner. Every day that doors stay closed, more jobs

are lost.

“This positive direction of travel is possible thanks to the immense sacrifices people continue to make but the game-changer is the UK’s extraordinary vaccine programme.

“When people head to the polling station in three weeks’ time, they can confidently back my Scottish Conservatives as the only party with the strength to stand up to the SNP and block their damaging plan for another divisive referendum.

“The next Scottish Parliament must ensure all focus is devoted to the critical job of kick-starting the economy and rebuilding our country.”

Scottish Greens have urged caution as restrictions lift to avoid a new wave of the COVID-19 virus.

Following the announcement that people will be able to leave local authority areas and gather in larger groups from this Friday, Scottish Greens candidate for Mid Scotland and Fife Mark Ruskell said: “The news that family members will be able to meet for the first time in many months will be welcome relief, but we will only avoid another wave of the virus if we are cautious. That means maintaining safe distancing and staying outdoors.

“Members of the JCVI have warned that, even with the vaccine rollout, that a new wave of the virus can still happen if we lose control. COVID-19 can still impact the young and not yet vaccinated, and we have seen more and more evidence of the impact of long COVID. For this reason we probably don’t want to replicate the images of large groups gathering that we saw in London. A surge in gatherings could create a surge in the virus and avoiding that is hugely important to avoid the risk of a third lockdown.””



Alex Cole Hamilton MSP. Photo: © 2021 Martin P. McAdam
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Responding to the Scottish Government’s Covid update, health

spokesperson Alex Cole-Hamilton said: “After months of sacrifices, the public are finally regaining some hard-won freedoms.

“We shouldn’t forget that what was billed as a fortnight long circuit breaker lockdown for Glasgow has had most of Scotland in its grip for months.

“To ensure that there are no more lockdowns we need to shore up our testing and tracing capacity to ensure that any fresh outbreaks are quickly crushed and new strains cannot take hold. I am concerned that the Scottish government have consistently acted too late on testing and tracing.

“With hospitality businesses in other parts of the UK now open, the Scottish Government must now make sure that financial support is now available to ensure that Scottish businesses don’t lose out.”

Loganair has welcomed today’s announcement by the First Minister that tourists will again be allowed to travel to Scotland’s islands from 26 April.

Chief executive Jonathan Hinkles said: “We are heartened to see the Scottish Government has set out a path to the safe re-opening of travel and tourism to and from Scotland’s islands – a move which has been made possible by the tremendous progress on the Covid vaccination programme.. It is great news and can’t come a moment too soon for the parts of our islands’ economies which are hugely dependent on tourism.

“As the airline which has served island communities for over 50 years and which remains fully committed to what is our heartland, we are very much looking forward to supporting this re-opening.

“Tickets are now on sale to all of our island destinations, and we would emphasise that our customers can have absolute confidence through our Flex & Protect initiative that if the

rules do change again, they can re-arrange their bookings without further cost.”

All council areas are at Level 4 apart from the following areas which are at Level 3:

- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles)
- Orkney Islands
- Shetland Islands
- the following islands in Argyll and Bute: Coll, Colonsay, Erraid, Gometra, Iona, Islay, Jura, Mull, Oronsay, Tiree, and Ulva
- all islands in Highland, except the Isle of Skye which is at Level 4

Timetable for easing restrictions

The levels will change on the following dates:

- 26 April: mainland Scotland and islands at Level 4 are expected to move to Level 3. Islands at Level 3 will remain there until 17 May
- 17 May: all of Scotland will move to Level 2
- June (early): all of Scotland will move to Level 1
- June (late): all of Scotland will move to Level 0



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