

Coronavirus – government adds testing to certification scheme

The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced to MSPs today that the vaccine certification scheme will remain in place, and that the option of a negative lateral flow test result can be used at certain venues.

It means that individuals who received a vaccine not recognised by the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency), or have experienced difficulty accessing their vaccination record, will be able to attend venues covered by the scheme.

Ms Sturgeon also explained that following a close decision by the Cabinet that the certification scheme or Covid passport will not be extended to other venues such as pubs or cinemas. But she advocated much more testing in the run up to Christmas, particularly when people are about to enter a social setting in a venue or even in a domestic environment.

The certification scheme will continue to apply to major events and late-night venues. Regulations and guidance for businesses affected by the change will be published in the coming days.

The First Minister said: “This change makes it possible for

people who cannot be vaccinated, or who are not yet fully protected, to make use of the scheme. That will I know be welcomed.

“The new rule will also, we hope, encourage the greater use of regular lateral flow testing and it will still meet our aim of reducing the risk of transmission, within higher risk venues.

“We encourage everyone to continue to test themselves regularly and particularly before you meet up with people from outside your household, whether you are meeting in your home or public place. If you test positive stay home, isolate and take a PCR test.

“Certification continues to have a role in helping us to increase vaccine uptake to reduce the risk of transmission of Coronavirus, to alleviate pressure on our health and care services and to allow higher risk settings to continue to operate.

“Our NHS is still under pressure. We need to consider any proportionate measures we can take so that Covid case numbers start to fall, rather than levelling off.”

Scottish Conservatives Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Dr Sandesh Gulhane said: “The First Minister stressed the importance of booster vaccinations today, yet we are still hearing examples of people being forced to travel long distances in poor weather to get them.

“The Scottish Conservatives have called for the reopening of mass vaccination centres to help speed up the rollout, yet, once again, Nicola Sturgeon has refused to back that call.

“It is a relief that the vaccine passport scheme is not being extended. But the uncertainty that this government has left hanging over businesses for the past two weeks has been unnecessary and unacceptable.

“The Scottish Government released their so-called ‘evidence’ paper on Friday, yet in almost 70 pages were unable to offer proof of the scheme’s effectiveness. It seems more and more like they’re making it up as they go along.

“Businesses are scunnered. Making them wait even longer to hear if they will face extra costs and burdens in the run-up to Christmas is a slap in the face.

“On Friday, the vaccine passport app south of the border was updated to register booster jags. The SNP Government insisted on going with their own app at an estimated cost of £4.5 million – yet, today, Nicola Sturgeon failed to provide an update as to when the Scottish app will be able to record booster doses.

“It is unacceptable that so many weeks after it was first launched, the SNP’s vaccine passport app is still not fit for purpose.”

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar said: “From the start of the pandemic, the WHO has been clear that testing is the most effective way to control transmission of the virus.

“Scottish Labour has called repeatedly for the use of lateral flow tests as part of the scheme to reduce transmission.

“But instead of listening to medical and public health experts and businesses – the First Minister ignored everyone and ploughed on with a passport scheme which doesn’t drive up vaccination rates.

“Winter is fast approaching, and the First Minister says we are in a precarious situation. We have spent months pursuing the wrong priority.

“I welcome the government’s U-turn today but it is clear that the First Minister has wasted months ignoring experts and the evidence.

“We must now urgently get a grip on transmission and that means looking to tackle the spread of the virus where it is moving fastest – in schools.

“We know how to mitigate against this – improve and increase ventilation.

“Ventilation schemes were unambitious and in many of Scotland’s schools the best advice this winter is to just leave windows open.

“The First Minister often rightly calls on the public to listen to and follow expert advice – it would be refreshing for her to do the same.”

Stephen Montgomery, Group Spokesperson for the Scottish Hospitality Group, said: “The Scottish Hospitality Group welcomes the confirmation from the First Minister today that the vaccine certification scheme will not be extended to further hospitality venues.

This is a good decision based on evidence. Our members also welcome the continued constructive engagement with the hospitality sector.

“The health and safety of our customers has always been our top priority, and that is why we have invested heavily in making Scottish hospitality venues the safest public environments to eat, drink and socialise. We want to keep Scotland’s best-loved pubs, bars, clubs and restaurants open for business and will continue to work tirelessly to do so.

“We echo the First Minister’s message that the focus should continue be on vaccination and booster jags to keep the Scottish population safe and prevent further spread of the virus.

“Looking forward, we would urge for continued support for hospitality venues across Scotland, especially as the festive

period approaches. Hospitality is still facing significant challenges and the suffering from the long-term effects of the pandemic, with rising supplier costs and an ongoing recruitment crisis putting real pressure on the industry. We look forward to working with the Scottish Government to ensure the Scottish Hospitality sector can fully recover and help in driving Scotland's economy forward."

Proof of vaccination is currently required to enter:

- late night venues open after midnight with alcohol and music and dancing
- unseated indoor live events, with more than 500 people in the audience
- unseated outdoor live events, with more than 4,000 people in the audience
- any event, of any nature, which has more than 10,000 people in attendance
- no personal data is stored on the NHS Scotland Covid Check app