

Coronavirus – omicron variant update

The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and Chief Medical Officer, Gregor Smith, delivered a briefing to the media at St Andrew's House on Monday.

Six cases of the new omicron variant have been identified in Scotland in Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Ms Sturgeon started her update by saying that the overall situation in Scotland remains stable but that it was already known that the weeks ahead would pose some risks to that stability. Those risks were thought to be the winter weather and winter flu. But a new risk has arisen from the new variant, omicron.

Ms Sturgeon said that this could be the most challenging development in recent times. She said: "There is still much that we and the rest of the world do not know about it. This variant might be more transmissible than Delta, but much more data and analysis is required, as well as the impact it might have on the effectiveness of vaccines."

Confirming that there is also no information that symptoms are different, Ms Sturgeon said: "What we do know confirms my view that we should treat this seriously. This poses a bigger challenge than we have had in recent times."

It is the result of enhanced surveillance that the six cases have been identified. Contact tracing is still ongoing, but not all cases have recent travel history, particularly to

countries in Southern Africa. The First Minister said this suggests there might be some community transmission, but it may not be widespread as yet.

Ms Sturgeon continued to explain that some actions have been taken on a precautionary basis. She said: “We have already reintroduced some travel restrictions. Given that omicron is already present, we should step up wearing face coverings, washing hands, and testing regularly. Work from home whenever possible, employers asked to maximise that if at all possible. A key part of response is to break the chain of transmission. Additional testing will be carried out in the geographical areas where cases have been identified.”

The red list has been revived and now includes ten countries – so anyone arriving in Scotland from there must self-isolate for ten days in managed quarantine.

Ms Sturgeon continued: “It is always important in the face of new developments to prepare for the worst, but we are hoping for something short of the worst.

“There are actions we can all take, and vaccination is the most important line of defence. As already confirmed, the booster programme will be stepped up. The Scottish Government is ready to react to any new JCVI regulations – which may be announced later today.

40-49-year-olds can now book a booster online.

Adults aged 40 to 49 are now able to book their COVID-19 booster online. You will not be sent an appointment letter, so please book your appointment at <https://t.co/GK87vtr6anpic.twitter.com/Ld2liPgYeR>

– NHS Lothian (@NHS_Lothian) [November 28, 2021](#)

The Scottish Government will consider any further measures in

the coming days, but Ms Sturgeon urged that now is the time to follow all the advice rigorously again. She and the Welsh First Minister have written to the Prime Minister asking for a four nations approach to reintroduce a Day 8 PCR test to tighten up restrictions.

The First Minister reminded everyone of the various ways to protect themselves and others:

- Get vaccinated
- Test for Covid regularly particularly when you are about to socialise – test kits are free
- Wear face coverings on public transport and in shops and when moving around in hospitality settings
- Ventilation on public transport and in any situations where people gather
- Hygiene – wash your hands and clean surfaces

There is guidance on [The Scottish Government website here.](#)