

Coronavirus – today's figures and guidance issued about Christmas gatherings

The Scottish Government has advised that arrangements for Christmas should change – but not be cancelled – and that a maximum of three households should gather at the festive period.

Public Health Scotland publishes data on Covid-19 in Scotland each day. Today's figures were announced by the First Minister in The Scottish Parliament at the regularly weekly update. But this update was already flagged up as important as it was widely expected that new restrictions would be introduced.

Ms Sturgeon repeated that she expected a tsunami of cases in the weeks ahead. She advised against assuming that the new variant is milder as some initial evidence from Denmark shows

that the new variant may not be.

She explained that the modelled estimates in the paper on Omicron published last Friday show that the number of cases could rise to 10,000 per day.

She also warned that “we must take Omicron extremely seriously”. She said: “I ask everyone to think of this in terms of a race between the vaccine and the virus.

“Just as the virus started to win this race the virus started to run faster. The effect of one or two doses is much less than the effect of having a booster vaccination.

“Speeding up vaccination is the government’s top priority but in the short term it will not be sufficient. Some further measures will be needed to slow the new variant down. We do not do this lightly.”

The First Minister outlined the new measures:

- To keep businesses open – step up protections in business premises e.g. measures to avoid crowding in shops and in bars
- Working from home is now a legal duty where possible – or employees encouraged to test regularly
- Wearing face coverings
- General public – do not cancel Christmas but everyone must reduce contact with other households but asked to cut this down to break the chain of transmission before and after Christmas – no limit on the number of people on Christmas Day itself.
- If socialising please limit households to a maximum of three – and test before you go
- Keep rooms ventilated

Ms Sturgeon explained that Omicron has a high attack rate so one person can infect many more people than was the case with the Delta variant. She said: “Many protections come at a

financial cost and devolved nations cannot borrow to fund this. The Treasury has no further funding for Scotland Northern Ireland and Wales as the UK Government is not putting any further measures into place. For now this public health step is curtailed by lack of finance.”

(As she was answering Scottish Conservative leader, Douglas Ross’s questions the First Minister was handed a note about funding which had just been announced by UK Chancellor, Rishi Sunak.)

The Scottish Government will use £100 million to help hospitality and culture sectors to weather this storm, and that money will be made available as soon as possible. Plus a further £100 million for the self-isolation support grant is also being made available. This is the limit to what can be done within Scottish Government resources and they continue to press the UK government.

Regarding booster vaccinations – 40-60 year olds all have a letter, all 30-39 and 18-29-year-olds can book appointments online from tomorrow. Some capacity challenges are inevitable and the government hopes to have an 80% uptake by the end of the month and the balance in January.

Ms Sturgeon said that the booster dose is of vital importance. The waiting time of 15 minutes after a vaccination is being removed, and additional centres and drop-ins are planned. The number of volunteers and their role is being expanded, and the size of the vaccination workforce is also being extended.

Schools will remain open if at all possible and all pupils and staff are asked to test regularly and particularly before going back after the holidays.

Any figures marked with * are affected by IT or other reporting issues.

