

Coronavirus – omicron measures will end on Monday

While case numbers remain relatively high, the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has announced to The Scottish Parliament that the tightening of the restrictions which came into effect almost a month ago will be relaxed next Monday. But she warned that the country is not yet moving from the pandemic to the endemic stage of the virus, although she hopes “that transition is underway”.

Today the number of new positive cases was 7,752 in Scotland and 31 people have died taking the total number of deaths to 10,093, but according to the weekly numbers Ms Sturgeon said that “cases were falling across most age groups and the trend is continuing”.

She explained: “On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of last week, 36,526 new positive cases were recorded through PCR and lateral flow tests.

“This week – over Sunday, Monday and today Tuesday, 20,268

cases have been reported, so quite a significant drop.”

From 5am on Monday 24 January, restrictions including one metre physical distancing in hospitality and leisure settings and table service in hospitality venues will not be required. Attendance limits at indoor events will be removed. Non-professional indoor contact sports will also resume.

The need for face coverings in public places and on public transport will remain in place, mainly to limit the spread of the virus and to reduce pressure on essential services.

Everyone who can work from home is asked to continue to do that, but from the beginning of February the government will engage with business about a hybrid approach – so long as cases continue to decline.

Nightclubs will reopen with the Covid certification scheme remaining in place. The government will introduce measures to prevent venues from avoiding the scheme by placing tables on dance floors while also allowing dancing. For now the Covid certification scheme will not be extended to other premises, such as licensed hospitality venues.

But coupled with the good news the First Minister reminded everyone to keep gatherings as small as possible, use lateral flow tests as often as possible and continue to use face coverings.

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar said: “Today’s announcements offer hope to a lot people, but too many businesses are still teetering on the brink and too many workers have found themselves waiting for weeks with no support.

“Just one example from my home city, on where the First Minister needs to go further now. More than 100 staff working at two Glasgow theatres have been left without pay for an entire month. This is just one example from one sector that

tells a story about the lack of urgency from this government.

“The scheme which would support these workers won’t even publish its guidelines until tomorrow. Applications won’t open for another week. These workers have bills to pay and families to feed now. They cannot be left waiting any longer. Two years into this pandemic we should already have a system which builds resilience.

“We all hope the worst is behind us – but going forward any changes in these restrictions cannot be ad-hoc. We need a system that sets clear trigger points on what people can expect when cases rise – which lays out what support people will be entitled to and when.

“But we still don’t know what the framework will include and when exactly we will get a chance for meaningful debate of detailed proposals. Restrictions, however well intentioned, have had a detrimental impact on people’s mental health and wellbeing – they cannot be expected to live their lives like that again.”