

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## The Executive Office

### DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE ON COVID-19, 29 JULY 2021

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**Mr Givan (The First Minister) and Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister):** Following careful consideration of the public health situation and wider societal context, the Executive has today agreed a number of changes to the Covid-19 restrictions.

The following changes will come into effect from 18.00 on Friday 30 July.

#### **Social distancing**

The Executive has considered whether some changes can be made to social distancing arrangements at this time, noting that there will be a fuller discussion on 12 August.

The Executive has noted the health benefits of social distancing, the economic benefits of sectors and venues re-opening, and the societal benefits this brings. The Executive has therefore decided that:

- In relation to retail and shopping centres, the regulations will move from a requirement for 2 metres to 1 metre. This will ensure consistency in regulations with other indoor settings such as hospitality and indoor attractions.
- For outdoor venues, the guidance will continue to note the health benefits of 2 metres social distancing. However, the guidance will further advise that social distancing requirements are strongly advised but are not a requirement. Where possible, a minimum of 1 metre should be maintained and ideally 2 metres.

The Executive remains concerned about the spread of the virus and its transmissibility. Therefore, the Executive calls on all venues, customers and attendees to be mindful of this in organising and attending events, and to follow all the public health advice on matters such as hand washing, wearing of face coverings, the benefits of taking lateral flow tests, and the essential need to self-isolate if you have a positive test or are otherwise asked to do so. The virus remains a risk to our health and economic wellbeing and the steps taken today must be seen in that context.

#### **Live music venues**

We are expanding our previous decision, to allow the return of live music in concert halls and theatres, to include other indoor venues such as function rooms of hotels, or community halls.

There will be no restriction to background or ambient levels of volume. Where the venue is a space within larger premises, access to the venue must be effectively controlled and managed and the venue must be sufficiently isolated from the rest of the premises to ensure that the volume of the music in the venue does not breach ambient or background levels in other parts of the premises.

Entry to performances for audiences will be by ticket only. Tickets must be purchased in advance of the performance. Audiences for indoor events must have allocated seating and remain seated, dancing will not be permitted and social distancing of 1m will be required.

#### **Use of risk reduction measures**

The use of lateral flow testing for all events is strongly advised as a measure to reduce risk. Social distancing; the use of face coverings; and holding events outdoors where possible, are also advised as mitigating measures.

### **International Travel**

From 2 August there will be a pilot roll out of the expansion of the amber vaccinated arrivals policy to include people vaccinated in any of the EU27 (except France); EFTA countries (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein); and the European microstate countries (Andorra, Monaco, and Vatican City) and the United States.

In relation to arrivals from the United States, it was agreed that the policy approach will be that: only people fully vaccinated with FDA-approved vaccines in the US rollout, who can present a CDC card as proof of vaccination, would be included. A requirement to prove residency in addition to the CDC card for US arrivals was agreed, to mitigate against fraud.

From 31 July, international cruises will restart in line with the traffic light system, with strong guidance to the sector outlining the need to manage increased risks and maintain risk mitigations (including use of vaccination and testing), alongside continued monitoring of cruise data and clear contingency plans.

Measures will be put in place to facilitate alternative managed isolation arrangements for international student arrivals from red list countries from 9 August.

From 2 August, a bespoke testing regime will be implemented, which will apply to NI international arrivals exempt from self-isolation because they are travelling for work. This will only apply to specific types of work as outlined in the regulations.

An exemption from self-isolation for Villarreal fans and UEFA VIPs travelling for the Super Cup Final on 11 August will be put in place, with the IFA putting in place a range of mitigations.

### **Recovery Plan**

The Executive today also agreed the Building Forward – Consolidated Covid Recovery Plan that we will publish tomorrow.

Covid-19 has affected all aspects of our society. Sadly, many people have lost their lives and this has had a devastating impact on families and communities. There has also been profound disruption to people's lives and livelihoods and a significant impact on people's physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The purpose of the draft Recovery Plan is to accelerate economic, health and societal recovery in the short term so we can emerge stronger and also to plan now for longer term transformative and innovative change.

For the last 18 months, our focus has been on providing an immediate, coordinated response to the Covid 19 pandemic. However, with the easing of coronavirus restrictions, it is timely for the Executive to look to the future and bring together a suite of recovery actions into this new strategy. The virus unfortunately continues to have an impact on our lives and we must not lose sight of that as we go about our daily lives.

Already existing economic, health and societal challenges were exacerbated as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and this requires immediate action as we begin the transition from crisis mode to recovery.

We have developed the integrated Recovery Plan to inform our priorities to accelerate recovery over a 24-month period through focused, collaborative working. The Plan details 83 highly impactful interventions that will be progressed over the next 24 months to deliver recovery for all our citizens under four strategic Recovery Accelerators: sustainable economic development; green growth and sustainability; tackling inequalities and health of the population. These work together to ensure that we can emerge stronger from the pandemic.

We want to see our economy revived, resilient and dynamic. These interventions will help ensure we have an inclusive society where people have equal access to opportunities. The health of the population accelerator will lead to a resilient health sector, with all having access to health and social care in line with targets. We have prioritised green growth and sustainability to reduce our emissions and protect our environment.

Inequalities that were already present in our society have been made worse over the last 18 months and it is essential these are addressed head on to prevent any further decline. Key to this is strong economic growth to create opportunities for our citizens, improve our lives and to help achieve our green growth and sustainable ambitions.

As we begin the journey to recovery, we don't want to lose the positive changes to our ways of working and living that came about as a result of the pandemic. We have seen a beneficial impact on our environment; we have seen a greater use of technology; and we have seen businesses and individuals respond in innovative and imaginative ways. We must continue to build on this.

The Recovery Plan is not about getting us back to where we were before but rather provides the foundation for renewal. We are looking to do things differently, apply what we have learned in responding to the crisis and ultimately aim to be in a better position than we were before.

Looking further ahead, it is important that what we deliver through the Recovery Plan will contribute to achieving our longer-term strategic objectives in our developing Programme for Government and commitments under New Decade New Approach.

We continue to urge all people who can to get both doses of the vaccine as soon as possible to help protect yourself and others. Information is available at [nidirect.gov.uk/covidvaccine](https://nidirect.gov.uk/covidvaccine) as to where you can walk in for a jab or book an appointment.

And please continue to follow the public health advice to help keep yourself, and everyone else, safe and help us to continue to make this positive progress.