

Written Ministerial Statement

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The Executive Office

DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE ON COVID-19, 6 SEPTEMBER 2021

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Mr Givan (The First Minister) and Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): The Executive has today agreed a number of modest relaxations to the current Coronavirus Regulations.

The changes are in line with its Pathway out of Restrictions, retaining a cautious approach as Covid-19 continues to present challenges.

The decisions taken today are appropriate when we reflect on the latest case numbers and other important measures such as hospitalisations. The Executive remains of the view that protecting the education of our children and young people is one of our priorities, as is protecting our health and social care sectors.

It is vital that these relaxations are not seen as an indication that the threat from the virus has gone away. This is patently not the case. The Executive reiterates the importance of continuing to follow public health guidance, including the use of face coverings; observing social distancing and the importance of ventilation in all indoor settings.

The vaccination programme continues to protect our citizens and the Executive would encourage everyone to take up the vaccine offers. Vaccine centres are open and every person who avails of the vaccines is helping to make themselves, their families and communities safer.

The following steps must therefore be seen in the context that Covid-19 remains prevalent and ongoing care and attention is essential in all settings and sectors and in all our interactions with our families and friends.

The following changes will come into effect at 5pm on Friday 10th September 2021.

Domestic indoor settings

Recognising the impact that the pandemic has had on families, the maximum number of people who may meet indoors in a domestic setting is increased to 15 from up to 4 households.

Hospitality settings

The Executive has agreed that the current requirement for table service will be eased, both indoors and outdoors, to enable customers to go to the bar to place orders or pay. However, in indoor settings, customers will still be required to return to their table in order to consume their food or drink. Because there is less risk in outdoor settings, the prohibition on standing to consume food and drink outdoors will be removed.

It was also agreed to remove the prohibition on movement and standing to allow customers to play darts, pool, gaming machines etc.

The hospitality sector will also need to consider how best to manage the movement and queueing of customers to mitigate risk. In addition, the requirement to wear face coverings while not seated indoors will continue.

Music and dancing

In relation to indoor, live performance events (concerts and gigs) the requirements for tickets to be purchased in advance and allocated seating is removed. However customers must still be seated and the requirement to record contact details for all attendees continues.

The current restriction on music to background or ambient levels where that restriction currently applies is removed.

In addition, the current restriction on dancing in indoor settings is removed insofar as it applies to post wedding and civil partnership celebrations.

Working from home

While the message to work from home where possible and appropriate remains, the Executive would encourage employers to plan for a return to the workplace with consideration of mitigations to control the spread of the virus and engagement with employees and their representatives on the beneficial use of flexible working where appropriate.

Please continue to follow the public health advice to help keep yourself, and everyone else, safe.