

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## The Executive Office

### DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE ON 20 JANUARY 2022

*Published on 20 January 2022.*

**Mr Givan (The First Minister) and Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister):** The Executive has today agreed an approach for relaxing the measures put in place to manage the COVID-19 Omicron variant.

Ministers were updated today by the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor, who have confirmed that we are likely to be past the peak in case numbers, although it remains possible that case numbers may rebound somewhat due to the impact of the return of schools. Hospital admissions and COVID bed occupancy as a result of community transmission have also peaked and are beginning to fall slowly. Based on current data, a rise in COVID ICU occupancy is not expected in this wave.

The measures put in place in response to Omicron were a balanced and proportionate intervention based on the best available evidence. However, the improved outlook on hospital pressures allows us to relax some restrictions within the next week.

The Executive has agreed the following steps:

#### **From 21 January at 12 noon**

- In hospitality settings - the requirement to be seated whilst consuming food and/or drink and for table service in premises that provide alcohol will be removed as will the rule of 6.
- In domestic settings - guidance regarding the cap on the number households meeting indoors will be removed. (A maximum number of 30 people permitted to gather will be retained in regulation.)
- On face coverings – the requirement to provide proof of exemption will be removed and the reasonable excuse of 'severe distress' will be reintroduced.
- the guidance on working from home will revert to working from home where you can with employers encouraged to facilitate this.

The Executive has also been advised by the Department of Health that the minimum self-isolation period for people testing positive for Covid-19 will be reduced to five full days, subject to negative lateral flow tests on days 5 and 6 of their isolation.

#### **From 26 January at 12 noon:**

- Nightclubs will be permitted to open.
- Dancing and indoor standing events can resume.
- In relation to COVID-status certification – the legal requirement will continue to apply in relation to nightclubs and indoor unseated or partially seated events with 500 people or more. For other settings where COVID status certificates are currently required, guidance would strongly encourage their continued use.

- In workplaces - the requirement for offices to take reasonable measures for 2m social distancing will be removed. Guidance remains in place that risk assessments should be carried out.

## **10 February**

All remaining COVID measures will be reviewed by the Executive on 10 February.

This includes:

- the legal duty on retail to take reasonable measures to reduce the risk of transmission;
- the legal requirement to wear face coverings and the associated duty on businesses to take reasonable measures to ensure compliance;
- the legal requirement for risk assessments in prescribed settings;
- the legal requirement for recording visitor information in prescribed settings;
- the remaining legal requirements in relation to Covid-status certification;
- and
- the guidance on the regular use of LFD testing, and in particular before meeting up with others.

The Executive has praised the ongoing efforts of the public to limit the spread of the virus and urged everyone to continue to follow the public health advice.

By making safer choices we can all continue to play our part in the wider societal effort to keep ourselves and other safe.