

Written Ministerial Statement

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Executive Office

DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE ON COVID-19, 3 DECEMBER 2020

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Mrs Foster (The First Minister) and Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): Today, the Executive discussed its ongoing approach to mitigating the health, economic and societal impacts of COVID-19, and agreed a way forward in relation to the measures that will come into effect on 11 December 2020.

We are pleased to be able to update you on those decisions, which will allow our people, and our businesses, time to prepare.

The Executive has agreed that the following can open:

- Non-essential businesses, including retail and close contact services to include driving instructors.
- Pubs and private members' clubs serving a main or substantive meal that has been prepared in their own kitchen; restaurants and cafes. Contact details must be taken from all customers. Mitigations, that were previously required, will stay in place. Food and drink can be purchased until 10.30pm but cannot be consumed on the premises after 11.00pm, and all persons must vacate the venue by 11.00pm.
- Hotels and guesthouses. Mitigations that were previously required will stay in place, including restrictions on food and drink.
- Gyms, swimming and diving pools can open for individual training, training with a personal trainer and non-aerobic classes of up to 15. Contact details must be taken.
- Outdoor events and gatherings, subject to a risk assessment if more than 15 attending and measures in place to limit risk of virus transmission with an upper limit of 500 on participants.
- Sports events, subject to a risk assessment if more than 15 people attending with measures in place to limit risk of virus transmission. An upper limit of 500 spectators is permitted. Inter-school competitive sporting events are not permitted.

- Outdoor exercise in groups of up to a maximum of 15.
- Places of worship.
- Outdoor and indoor visitor attractions, museums, galleries and libraries.

The following must remain closed:

- Wet pubs and private members' clubs not serving a main or substantial meal. Off sales are permitted up to 10.30pm. This applies to off sales, supermarkets and hospitality venues selling alcohol.
- Concert halls and theatres, except for rehearsals and recordings.
- Nightclubs.

The Executive also agreed that:

- Current arrangements for gatherings in domestic and private dwellings will remain the same as is currently in place, apart from the temporary arrangements over the Christmas period.
- Receptions for marriages and civil partnerships are permitted, with numbers subject to risk assessment determined by the place of worship, or venue. Mitigations that were previously required will stay in place.
- Wedding ceremonies and civil partnerships will continue and the number attending will be determined by the place of worship, or venue.
- Attendees and the organiser/operator of funerals must comply with funeral guidance issued by the Department of Health.
- No holidaying in groups outside of the domestic settings rules – this applies to venues, such as self-catering chalets, which can accommodate large numbers.

The Executive is mindful that everyone has had a very difficult year. The festive period is important to us and we are taking modest steps to enable people to meet in domestic settings, outdoors, and in places of worship. This will apply from 23 to 27 December, and we acknowledge the need for everyone to make their decisions and exercise their choices most carefully over those days.

It has already been announced that during those days, up to three households may meet. This is to enable families and friends to spend time together over the Christmas period. The Executive has today agreed that the three households can consist of two households and one existing bubble. This is in recognition of the importance that bubbles have played in providing support and tackling social isolation.

We will be asking everyone to make their decisions carefully and to follow the public health guidance should families and friends decide to meet indoors. There will be guidance on NI Direct shortly.

We are acutely conscious that this is not a normal Christmas. Not everyone will choose to, or be able to, see everyone they would normally see, and this will be difficult for many. We are also conscious that not everyone has support systems, and that there are some people and families for whom Christmas is a difficult time in the best of times. The Executive, therefore, discussed some of the support systems that are in place. We are making sure that support and advice is readily accessible and we would encourage anyone who is lonely or vulnerable to make use of the help that is in place.

We are also focused on care homes, and the position of providers, residents and their families and friends. There will be more specific advice for the care home sector very soon.

We would remind Members that this remains a crucial time in our fight against COVID-19.

While the relaxation of some restrictions announced today, and the progress with vaccines, have given us much to be hopeful for, we are not out of the woods yet.

We cannot, and must not, forget the danger that COVID-19 poses to our communities.

The behaviour of each, and every one, of us over the coming weeks will determine whether we will need to put additional measures in place to protect the vulnerable in our society, and to prevent our health service from being overwhelmed.

We would urge everyone to work together and be careful at this time, particularly over the Christmas period, to protect those closest to us.