

Written Ministerial Statement

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The Executive Office

DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE ON COVID-19, 27 SEPTEMBER 2021

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Mr Givan (The First Minister) and Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): With furlough due to end in a few days we are very aware of the financial burden on businesses that aren't yet able to operate at full capacity due to the current social distancing restrictions and the very real concerns of those people whose jobs are at risk.

The Executive has today considered the existing regulations and has agreed to remove the legal requirement to socially distance in retail and indoor visitor attractions. We ask that those responsible for these venues, and those attending them, continue to utilise all other available mitigations such as hand sanitising, good ventilation, and using one way systems where possible. The wearing of a face covering remains a legal requirement in these settings.

The Executive has also decided to remove the requirement to socially distance in indoor seated venues such as theatres, concert halls and cinemas. For this sector we advise that additional mitigating measures are utilised, including proof of being fully vaccinated, or proof of a negative lateral flow rapid test, or proof of natural immunity from a positive PCR test undertaken in the previous 30-180 days.

The use of additional mitigations becomes even more important in the absence of social distancing and are vital to ensuring a safer, sustainable reopening to full capacity. Whilst the legal requirement for social distancing is being removed, we would ask people to keep close face to face contact to a minimum at all times.

We know from our engagement with the arts, culture and events sectors that a number of venues and event organisers have already been limiting access to those who are fully vaccinated or can show the necessary test results. We welcome this approach and appreciate the willingness of the sector to work with us to achieve a safer reopening.

The issue of social distancing in the hospitality sector will be considered at our meeting next week along with our autumn winter Covid Contingency Planning. We will continue our engagement with this sector as we approach the decision points relevant to them.

We would also like to remind the public that free lateral flow Rapid COVID-19 tests are freely available to the public. Alongside other mitigations, including social distancing, having good ventilation, washing hands and wearing face coverings, regular rapid testing can help to keep all our businesses open, and family and friends safer this winter. The tests are simple to use and provide results within 30 minutes.

Many businesses are establishing Rapid testing schemes to support a safe return to the workplace. If you cannot access rapid tests through your school or workplace, rapid tests can be ordered online for home delivery or collected from community pharmacies and other locations. Rapid tests are only for those with no symptoms. Anyone with COVID symptoms should self-isolate and book a PCR test immediately.

We would again take this opportunity to ask that everyone takes up both doses of the Covid-19 vaccination, and a booster dose if it is offered to you.