

Written Ministerial Statement

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The Executive Office

DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE ON COVID-19, 21 OCTOBER 2021

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Mr Givan (The First Minister) and Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): As we move into the autumn and winter months, it is vitally important that we all continue to do what we can to make sure we protect ourselves and others from Covid-19. This will help keep transmission under control, help protect our health service, and allow us all to benefit from an autumn winter period with fewer restrictions in place than at any time during the pandemic.

The Executive previously agreed that with effect from the end of October, the following relaxations would be in place:

- people can move around hospitality premises and indoor venues premises, including being able to stand to have a drink, eat food or watch a performance.
- indoor dancing will be allowed.
- the need to maintain social distancing in hospitality settings, such as pubs and restaurants will move to guidance, although we continue to ask people to keep close face to face contact to a minimum at all times.
- nightclubs can reopen.

In preparation for the further relaxation of restrictions in hospitality settings, engagement has been taking place with the sector on the practical application of remaining rules and mitigations.

The Executive has today confirmed that face coverings can be removed when eating and drinking in any indoor setting and when dancing.

We received an update today from the Head of our vaccination programme, Patricia Donnelly. We are grateful to the vaccination teams for their efforts to drive up vaccination rates.

The significant benefits of vaccination are evident. It protects the individual and those they are close to by helping to protect against hospitalisation and death. This in turn helps to reduce the pressure on the health service. The COVID-19 vaccination booster programme has now started and we would encourage everyone who is invited to receive their booster dose to take up the offer as soon as possible. While the booster programme has started, it isn't too late for those who remain unvaccinated to take up the offer of vaccination for their first or second doses at any of the many participating community pharmacies.

Together we can keep ourselves, and each other, safe. We would, therefore, again like to remind everyone of the small steps they can take to help stop Covid-19 from spreading:

- Get the vaccine when you are offered it;
- Wear a face covering in crowded or indoor settings;
- Wash your hands regularly, and cover your nose and mouth if coughing or sneezing;
- Self-isolate and take a PCR test if you have symptoms;
- Take regular tests if you don't have symptoms to reduce the risk of spreading the virus;
- Meet outside if you can, and open windows when indoors;
- Keep your distance from people not in your group; and
- Work from home where practicable, or do a mixture of home and office-based working.