



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Review of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restriction) (No.5)
(Wales) Regulations 2020**

DATE **29 January 2021**

BY **Mark Drakeford MS, First Minister**

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 5) (Wales) Regulations 2020 provide for a system of alert levels in Wales, as set out in the Welsh Government's updated *Coronavirus Control Plan*. They require a review of restrictions is undertaken every three weeks.

The most recent review was completed on 28 January and concluded the whole of Wales should remain at Alert Level 4. This means everyone must stay at home and work from home wherever possible. All non-essential retail, hospitality venues, licensed premises and leisure facilities must remain closed.

Cases of coronavirus are falling in all parts of Wales but they remain too high to consider a relaxation of the restrictions. The number of people testing positive is high and the intense pressure on our NHS remains. We can all be proud of excellent progress of the vaccination programme in Wales, but there is still a considerable way to go. We must not let the virus re-establish itself by moving to a lower alert level too soon.

At the last review of the restrictions, I said that unless there was a significant reduction in cases of coronavirus before today's review, schools and colleges would continue to provide remote learning until February half term. As a result of the people of Wales adhering to current restrictions, there are positive signs that collectively we are helping to drive down transmission in our communities. However, in light of the wider NHS indicators such as ICU bed occupancy, a cautious approach is still required so there will be no further opening up of education this side of half term and current arrangements remain in place.

Opening up education remains a top priority. If we continue to see numbers fall over the next month then our intention would be to see primary school pupils return in a phased and flexible way from 22 February. This recognises that our youngest learners find it more difficult to learn remotely; the evidence of the long-term impact, particularly for our youngest learners and the scientific evidence on transmission in younger children.

If there is sufficient headroom, we will bring back small numbers of secondary and college learners at the same time. We are working with schools, post-16 providers and unions to determine how that would be best achieved. Our priority will be vocational learners, including apprentices, who need access to training or workplace environments in order to undertake practical qualifications.

In the meantime, we will continue to work closely with unions and local authorities to discuss what further measures we can all take to ensure education settings are Covid secure environments. These discussions will be informed by health and science advice.

Education provision will continue after half term for vulnerable learners, children of critical workers, and learners undertaking essential exams or assessments and special schools and PRUs will continue to remain open where possible.

The restrictions currently provide for support bubbles to be formed to help single people and single parents. I recognise people's relationships and circumstances may change over time and we will amend regulations and guidance to allow for a support bubble to be changed provided both households do not see any other household for a period of 10 days before forming the new support bubble. This should be a last resort as it is safest if we do not change any support bubble we are in.

The restrictions will also be amended in Wales to allow a maximum of two people from two different households to exercise together, although they should make every effort to maintain social distancing. People must still start and finish exercise from their home unless a person needs to travel for health reasons. This means that, for now, if two people are meeting they will need to live nearby each other as travel for exercise is generally not allowed.

Finally, automatic car washes will be listed alongside petrol stations and garages as allowed to open to provide legal clarity.