



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 October 2021**

BY **First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS**

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 5) (Wales) Regulations 2020 require a review of the coronavirus restrictions is undertaken every three weeks. The most recent review was due by 28 October.

The situation in Wales is serious. Cases of coronavirus have risen sharply since the last three-week review of the regulations and have reached their highest point since the start of the pandemic, at more than 700 cases per 100,000 people.

Vaccination has helped to weaken the link between infections, serious illness and hospitalisations but it has not broken the link. The current sustained high rates of infections in the community are sadly translating into higher numbers of people being admitted to hospital with Covid-19. This is against a background of non-Covid-19 urgent and emergency pressures in health and social care services, which comparable to that normally experienced during the most difficult periods of winter. Sadly, we have seen an increase in Covid-19-related deaths.

If these high rates of community infection and transmission continue, we are likely to see increased pandemic-related pressures on the NHS and more people needing hospital care.

Wales will remain at alert level zero over the next three weeks. But we can only do so by strengthening the protective measures we have in place. It is hoped these measures, combined with increasing vaccination coverage, will help to reduce the high levels of community transmission we are currently seeing and protect people's health.

If case rates continue to rise over this three-week cycle, Ministers will have to consider raising the alert level at the next review and re-introducing restrictions.

Vaccines remain our best defence against the virus. Discussions have been held with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation about the best interval between the second dose of the vaccine and the booster.

To strengthen protective measures at alert level zero, we intend to extend the use of the COVID Pass, making it a requirement for entrance to cinemas, theatres and concert halls from 15 November, subject to a debate and vote in the Senedd. These are all venues where large numbers of people gather indoors for periods of time, often without face coverings.

If the public health situation does not improve, the next review of the coronavirus regulations will consider a further expansion of the COVID Pass to include more hospitality settings.

The self-isolation guidance will be changed. Fully vaccinated adults and children aged five to 17 must self-isolate if someone in their household has symptoms or tests positive for Covid-19 until they have had a negative PCR test result. If they are not vaccinated, they must self-isolate for 10 days.

This change is being made to reflect evidence that, while being fully vaccinated does reduce the risk of becoming infected, there may be a one in four chance of a fully vaccinated person contracting Covid-19 from someone you live with.

It is critical all businesses and organisations understand the nature and importance of the alert level zero baseline measures – these will help keep us all safe and help keep Wales open through the autumn and winter months.

I have written to social partners and Ministers are engaging with organisations and business representatives to reinforce the following points:

- Businesses, employers and other organisations must continue to undertake a specific coronavirus risk assessment and take reasonable measures to minimise exposure to, and the spread of, coronavirus.
- Adults and children aged 11 and over must wear face-coverings in indoor public places, with the exception of hospitality settings. Employers and businesses should make it clear this is a legal requirement.
- People should work from home wherever possible to help reduce the number of contacts between people. This is particularly important when cases rates in the community are high.

Every contact we have with other people can help spread the virus when rates of the virus are this high. This makes all the other measures we can all take very important, including staying at home if we are ill; getting a test if we have symptoms of Covid-19, meeting people outdoors or in well-ventilated places, social distancing, washing our hands regularly and avoiding crowds.

We will be providing further support to head teachers to help reduce the circulation of the virus in schools. A toolkit will be published next week, which will provide practical advice and support for schools to make the process of escalating and de-escalating measures quicker and easier. Greater emphasis will also be placed on the importance of staff and secondary school students to take lateral flow tests twice a week.

We need a concerted effort from everyone across Wales to help bring cases of coronavirus under control. Only with this collective effort can we continue to keep Wales safe and open.