

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT FROM THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER – DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE ON COVID-19, 13 MAY 2021

Thanks to the efforts of the public and the continued success of our vaccination programme, we are in a position to signal a further set of relaxations. We also discussed issues around international travel and travel within the CTA.

To assist preparations for reopening, we have also agreed the detail of conditions under which some of the sectors will operate.

We have good news for those with marriage and civil partnerships planned, as well as indoor visits in domestic settings and for the hospitality sector and for those needing a hug from families and friends.

In relation to our previous decisions, which come into place on 24 May, subject to a review on the 20 May, we have decided the following:

Reopen unlicensed and licensed premises indoors with mitigations

The Executive has previously indicated that hospitality will re-open fully, with mitigations, on 24 May. This will be subject to a ratification decision on 20 May.

The Executive discussed this again today, noting that the Covid data continues to have a generally positive direction of travel. The Executive remains committed to re-opening on 24 May and provided the data remains generally positive, that decision will be ratified. We recognize the steps the sector has taken to be ready for re-opening and it is important that we give clarity as soon as we can.

The Executive has also looked carefully at the mitigations which need to be put in place and we stress again the importance of contact details for test and trace. We have considered the seating arrangements again, and subject to review on 20 May, we will relax the table settings for indoor and outdoor hospitality to permit 6 people to sit together, removing the restriction on the number of households they can be from.

Other conditions are:

- Children under 12 are not counted in the 6
- Table service only
- More will be permitted if all are from one household, to a maximum of 10.
- All contact details must be taken and retained.
- Social distancing required – minimum of 1m.
- Must stay at table – no gaming machines, pool tables, etc.;
- Face coverings must be worn once no longer seated for any reason, for example, to go to the toilet
- No meal requirement
- No dancing

- No live music
- Music must be at ambient level to permit normal conversation
- Risk assessment as per current regulations for outdoors

Reopen the remainder of Tourist Accommodation

The indoor licenced areas will be covered as above.

The other conditions that will apply are:

- All contact details must be taken and retained
- Rooms/accommodation area booking in line with the permission re indoor domestic settings/bubbles
- Shared facilities will reopen
- Meeting rooms will be reopened - capacity will be to risk assessment maximum.
- **Post wedding and civil partnership events:**
 - Risk assessment for capacity
 - No restriction on top table
 - Other tables maximum of ten (no household restriction)
 - Children under 12 excluded from table numbers
 - One dance permitted for the couple
 - Music same as for licenced venues
- Other hospitality events e.g. gala dinners, functions, ticketed or not:
 - Capacity to risk assessment maximum.
 - Subject to other indoor hospitality requirements e.g. table seating, contact details, music etc.
- Conference facilities in tourism sector – the closure will be removed from the Regulations to allow use for other purposes to risk assessment capacity.

As a result of the changes to tourism we are removing the restriction on staying overnight away from your normal home.

Allow visits indoors in Domestic Settings

- 6 people from no more than 2 households
- Does not include children under 12
- Can be more if household has more than 6, but not more than 10
- Overnight stays permitted

Indoor visitor attractions - includes amusement arcades, bingo halls, museums, galleries and cinemas.

- Social distancing
- Risk assessment to maximum capacity
- All contact details must be taken and retained

Resume indoor group exercise and training in numbers limited to suit the venue - includes soft play areas, leisure centres, gyms, swimming pools, equestrian centres, venues relating to motor sport and activity centres.

- Social distancing
- Risk assessment to maximum capacity
- All contact details must be taken and retained

New decisions taken today are as follows:

We have reviewed the Stay Local messaging and concluded that with the reopening of tourism and other areas, it is time to step away from that message, to focus more on individuals' behaviours rather than distance travelled.

From 24 May, subject to review on 20 May we have decided to:

Increase numbers permitted for indoor gatherings, (not including domestic settings), to those permitted by a risk assessment or the venue. This will allow the resumption of community events, such as mother and toddler groups. Where the gathering is of more than 15 people, it must be an organised gathering with a risk assessment.

Increase numbers for outdoor gatherings to 500 or capped at risk assessment level if lower. This would allow up to 500 spectators at any outdoor event. Any gatherings of over 30 people outdoors must be an organised gathering and would require a risk assessment. We would advise organisers to consider the use of Lateral Flow Tests for any planned larger events.

We have agreed that the Irish Cup Final on 21 May can be used as an **event for logistical and operational learning** permitting 1,000 spectators.

We will be amending the **Face Coverings** Regulations to require mandatory wearing of face coverings in all indoor areas accessible by the public unless exempt. Guidance will be updated to provide examples of venues where face coverings must be worn and to take account of circumstances for individuals experiencing communication difficulties.

Libraries will re-open and provide limited in-library services in line with permitted gathering numbers.

Schools will be able to resume extra-curricular activities, indoor extra-curricular sports, outdoor inter-schools sports and day educational visits

There will be a **full return to outdoor sport** through the removal of

- the limit of 15;
- the limit on squad training;
- the requirement for outdoor sport being permitted only for those affiliated to a Governing body or an organisation that regulates a sport or sporting activity;

- and the cap of 100 on competitive sporting events, and replace with an overall limit of 500 on all outdoor sporting events.

This will allow the more informal sporting events, such as 5-a-side matches to take place up to 500 participants, with 500 spectators also.

There will be a return to **indoor club training in squads** from 24 May, followed by a return to **indoor competitive sport** from **31 May**.

And from the **21 June** we have agreed to remove the restriction on audiences in **seated theatres and concert halls** and other venues and to the **return of conferences and exhibitions**. These decisions will be subject to review in June.

Finally, we are also conscious that people want to see their family and friends again in less restricted circumstances. While there is an ongoing need to be cautious and careful, and to think about individual circumstances and scenarios, the Executive sees benefit in people being able to hug their loved ones. However, physical contact with others will always be associated with risk of transmitting the virus, and that risk will be greater when one or more of those involved has not been vaccinated.

The rules on social distancing in hospitality and retail are not changing at this time and hugging is not permitted in those environments.

In relation to **travel within the CTA**, which is currently subject to advice and guidance, we have decided to remove the essential travel reasons requirement and retain the guidance on self-isolation and add two new exemptions to this:

- visits to family and friends;
- those who have completed mandatory managed quarantine on arrival at a point of entry elsewhere in the CTA and travelled directly to NI.

Those exempt from self-isolation will be asked in guidance to take a pre-departure LFD test, and LFD tests and days 2 and 8 post arrival in NI.

At present, there is advice not to travel in or out of Northern Ireland except where it is essential to do so. The list of essential reasons to travel is published on NIDirect.

If you are arriving into Northern Ireland from within the Common Travel Area and you plan to remain here for at least 24 hours, public health advice is that you should self-isolate upon arrival for 10 days, unless you are exempt.

We ask everyone to take care of yourselves and each other and remember outdoors is generally safer than indoors.