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Donald Cameron MSP  
Convener  
Covid-19 Committee  
[Covid.Committee@parliament.scot](mailto:Covid.Committee@parliament.scot)

17 February 2021

Dear Donald,

## **COVID-19 COMMITTEE: FURTHER INFORMATION**

In previous Committee sessions, I undertook to provide the Committee with further information in response to various questions. The following additional information is in response to some of those questions but I will write to you again on questions which have been asked in more recent weeks once the relevant information has been obtained.

### **Genomics studies of Wave 1 and early Wave 2**

At the meeting on 4 February, Professor Leitch offered to share with the Committee the public data on the two genomics studies of Wave 1 and early Wave 2. Research was published in the Scientific Journal Nature Microbiology on 21 Dec 2020. Public access to the paper and the data contained therein can be found [here](#).

### **Return of schools: Consultation**

On 4 February, the Committee asked about the involvement of unions in discussions prior to the announcements of schools returning on 22 February. The COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) was established in April 2020 to bring decision makers and key influencers together to work in partnership with Ministers. CERG members all agree on the overarching points that the benefits of returning children and young people to full time education and ensuring school staff feel safe are at the forefront of our minds. The Group is chaired by the Deputy First Minister in partnership with Cllr McCabe, CoSLA and membership includes professional organisations, teachers representatives, local government, parents representatives and a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament. I can confirm that such partnership working continues to be one of the strengths in developing guidance and delivering clear messages to support Government decisions around education recovery.

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As part of this specific task CERG members, including representatives from AHDS, SLS, GTCS, EIS and Unison, were part of the fortnightly review discussions ahead of each Cabinet decision. Furthermore CERG members and NASUWT, SSTA, Voice, Unite and GMB were consulted on the developing guidance, which was published on 16 February to support the First Minister's announcement of schools returning from 22 February.

### **Eligibility for Self-Isolation Grant: Scottish Ambulance and agency Health Board staff**

I previously offered to confirm to the Committee whether or not Scottish ambulance staff and agency staff in health boards are eligible for the £500 self-isolation grant. The eligibility criteria for the SISG apply to all workers in Scotland, no sector is excluded. Anyone who experiences a drop in income when asked to self-isolate would be eligible. An income assessment will be performed and if their income is low enough they will receive the one off payment of £500. If a person would not lose income during their self-isolation period, they will not be eligible.

### **Support grants: Driving instructors**

On 28 January, I offered to look into when driving instructors will be able to access support grants. Driving instructors can apply for the £30m Mobile and Home-Based Close Contact Services Fund, which launched this week. Eligible applicants will receive a one-off £4,000 payment (£2,000 for the period to end December 2020 and a further £2,000 to cover the period from January 2021 onwards). Information on eligibility is available at [FindBusinessSupport.gov.scot](https://www.findbusinesssupport.gov.scot).

### **Travel between Scotland and the Republic of Ireland: Extended Households**

Annabelle Ewing raised the case of a person in her constituency who is unsure if they can continue their extended household arrangement with their partner due to restrictions on travel to the Republic of Ireland.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 set out that travel between Scotland and a place within the common travel area (as defined in the regulations at Schedule 7A, paragraph 4 - which includes the Republic of Ireland) is not permitted, unless you have a reasonable excuse for doing so. Examples of a reasonable excuse are listed in the legislation. [Schedule 7A, paragraph 3\(2\)\(aa\)](#) lists "where the person is a member of an extended household, visit a member of the household which forms the other part of the extended household and who lives outwith the area in which the person lives or, as the case may be, in Scotland" as an example of a reasonable excuse for travelling between Scotland and the common travel area. This will therefore apply for travel between Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. As a result, it is possible for the constituent to continue with their extended household arrangement.

### **NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde – self isolation advice**

During the Committee session on 17 December 2020, the Deputy Convener raised a question about self-isolation guidance in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area and it was agreed that I would follow up this point in writing.

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I can confirm that other than the recent reduction in the isolation period to 10 days from 14 December 2020 onwards, there has been no change to national policy regarding self-isolation requirements.

The specific matter raised relates to the discretion that local health boards have to implement health protection and contact tracing measures in their local area that have been risk assessed as being appropriate as part of their outbreak management response. In these instances, people will be advised to follow the Local Health Protection team's advice rather than the national guidance.

NHS Glasgow and Greater Clyde have advised that they only make decisions where self-isolation is not required on an individual risk assessed basis and are only issuing advice not to self-isolate in limited circumstances. The advice that people may not need to self-isolate has only been issued when people have proactively contacted NHS Glasgow and Greater Clyde directly and have indicated that such advice has been passed to a relatively small number of people.

Our local Test and Protect service carries out individual risk assessments for contacts of positive cases. As such, advice may vary from person to person when all relevant circumstances are taken into account.

### **Hunting**

On 10 December, in response to a question from Mark Ruskell I said I would provide information on the number of attendees allowed to attend a hunt and what exemptions are applicable to allow a hunt to occur when other group sports are not permitted. Obviously the situation has changed since that date and the whole of the country is now subject to greater restriction than it was then. There are no exemptions in the current guidance for hunting. There would be an exemption for legitimate pest control but such activities would have to be essential, operate in a COVID safe manner and would be subject to the prevailing restrictions regarding travel, household mixing as well as meet any licencing requirements set out by NatureScot.

### **Covid-19 Registry**

Stuart McMillan asked for figures on patients within levels of treatment in intensive care units.

The Scottish Intensive Care Society Audit Group (SICSAG) Report describes the admission frequency, demographics, activity and outcomes for patients with COVID-19 disease admitted to Scottish intensive care units. The [most recent report](#) was published in December by Public Health Scotland.

### **Support bubble for families with young children**

On 10 December, the Committee asked whether it is allowed for a family with young children to form a support bubble with another family in order to assist with child care. Extended households rules in Scotland were developed to reduce isolation and meet social need.

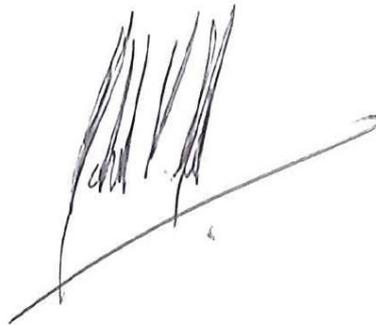
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They include lone parent households and single person households joining with other households, and to allow for informal childcare arrangements.

Where there is a vulnerability or another additional need, measures are in place to ensure that support visits can continue in people's own homes and/or access to support groups is permitted. You can find more guidance on extended households [here](#).

I hope this letter is helpful in providing more information on matters discussed in the course of these sessions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MICHAEL RUSSELL', written over a horizontal line.

**MICHAEL RUSSELL**

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