



Ken Macintosh MSP
Presiding Officer
Scottish Parliament

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Dear Presiding Officer

NEXT STEPS FOR EASING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

I am writing to inform you that the First Minister has today announced bringing forward further easings to the current COVID-19 restrictions.

As part of our approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic, regulations allowing for enforcement of protective measures have been in place since March 2020. These have been subject to regular review and we are required by law to maintain restrictions only for as long as they are necessary and proportionate to tackling the ongoing public health emergency posed by COVID-19.

We have seen continued progress in reducing the number of new Covid cases in Scotland. That is partly a consequence of vaccination but it's mainly due to everybody's willingness to continue to comply with Covid restrictions. The improved data in recent weeks, has led us to conclude we can bring forward some changes by a week, to Friday 16 April.

We are changing the rules for outdoor meetings from Friday. At the moment a maximum of four adults can meet up outdoors, from a maximum of two households. From Friday onwards, that will change to a maximum of six adults, from up to six households.

In the light of the continued progress in suppressing the virus we have concluded that a further relaxation of travel is possible in the run-up to the removal of travel restrictions within Scotland on 26 April. From Friday we will be able to travel anywhere within Scotland for the purposes of outdoor socialising, recreation, and informal exercise.

The First Minister also confirmed that we expect to lift restrictions on travel to and from England and Wales on 26 April.

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It may still be necessary in future to have temporary travel restrictions to and from places with high rates of Covid – either within Scotland or other parts of the UK – but from 26 April, we intend that people in Scotland will be able to travel anywhere across Britain. Northern Ireland is due to review its restrictions later this week - so we will review our approach to travel there before 26 April. And travel restrictions to and from other parts of the common travel area – including the Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands – will also be kept under review.

We have engaged with several Island communities and decided that when the rest of Scotland moves to level 3 on 26 April, we will align islands with the rest of the country for a period so that travel, and therefore parts of the economy that so many islanders rely on, can operate more normally from 26 April.

The data we have seen in the last two weeks gives us confidence that, if all goes well, on the 26 of April, all parts of Scotland will be placed in level 3. If progress continues, we hope to move to at least level 2 on 17 May, to level 1 in early June, and to level 0 in late June. Later on in the summer, as the number of people who have been vaccinated increases further, we hope that a level of normality well beyond level 0 will become possible.

The *Protection Levels Framework*, which provides more detailed information on the different levels, will be published on the Scottish Government website later today. These should help people to understand what all of this means in practice. These tables will also include more detailed information for the events sector, providing them with some ability to plan for the weeks and months ahead.

The First Minister additionally provided a briefing for party leaders this morning.

We will continue to keep the Scottish Parliament informed of our decisions.

This letter has been copied to the Covid-19 Committee, Health & Sport Committee, and Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee.

JOHN SWINNEY

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