

Thursday, 21 October 2021

Ministers announce Jersey's COVID-19 Winter Strategy

Ministers have announced Jersey's COVID-19 Winter Strategy, following advice from Public Health, and in consultation with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC).

The Strategy sets out the Government's commitment to Islanders leading up to winter. This includes continuing the winter vaccination programmes, keeping children and young people in school, businesses open, critical national infrastructure operating and hospital occupancy at a sustainable level.

The Strategy also explains what Islanders should do in the coming months to sustain the progress made, including COVID-safe behaviours, taking personal responsibility for keeping the community safe and managing risks according to personal circumstances, with more islanders having access to lateral flow tests.

If contingency measures are needed, the Strategy sets out a phased response, starting with asking Islanders to return to measures like working from home. Legal restrictions will be the very last resort.

Ministers will achieve these objectives by:

Maximising the uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations, and the seasonal flu vaccine, for all eligible groups

The continuation of the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out alongside flu vaccination, offers significant and evidenced, protection against the:

- impact of increased levels of seasonal respiratory diseases
- risk of increased rate of hospitalisations

The successful rollout of the Island's vaccination programme has had a significant impact on tackling COVID-19. As of 17 October 2021, 83% of eligible Islanders have received at least one dose, and 79% are now fully vaccinated, comprising 69% of Islanders in total.

This winter, the Government will continue delivering the COVID-19 vaccine programme, so that we can maximise levels of take-up in younger age groups where vaccine coverage is lower, increase vaccination among Islanders who are hesitant and those not yet vaccinated.

Government will improve levels of immunity for those at risk with booster jabs by offering boosters for waning immunity in at risk groups and over 50s, six months after their last dose.

Providing Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) to more Islanders

As part of the new Home Testing programme, Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) will be available free of charge to Islanders over the age of 12. The [Community Testing programme](#) (businesses and activity groups) and [School LFT programme](#) will continue to operate and are still open for registration. The offer will allow Islanders to take responsibility for their own testing needs and make risk-based decisions.

Islanders can sign up to more than one programme at a time and should aim to test themselves with LFTs at least twice a week.

Islanders will be able to register to receive LFT kits delivered to their home from Tuesday, 26 October. Islanders are encouraged to take a test once they receive the box of LFTs, before visiting at risk family members or friends, or before socialising with those who they would not see on a regular basis.

Making it easier to travel by removing the need for fully vaccinated passengers to test, and by implementing a Digital Covid Status Certification solution

As testing requirements are streamlined, PCR testing for passengers arriving at Jersey's borders will be reduced as part of the Safer Travel Policy, based on the COVID status of a passenger.

From Tuesday 2 November, passengers who meet any of the three COVID Status Certification criteria will not need to take a PCR test or isolate:

- those who are fully vaccinated (2 doses of an MHRA approved vaccine + 2 weeks)
- those who can demonstrate recently recovered status from a COVID-19 infection within the last 90 days
- those who have submitted a pre-departure PCR test.

Passengers who do not meet the COVID Status Criteria will still be required to take a PCR test on arrival and isolate until a negative test result is received. All passengers aged 11 and over will be required to complete a pre-departure travel form. Anyone vaccinated in Jersey will have their vaccination status automatically verified when returning to Jersey through giving their JY number.

Everyone arriving in Jersey will still need to meet safety criteria which provides a level of protection – whether that's vaccination, recent recovery, pre-departure test or testing on arrival.

This is a gradual, risk based, step-down approach in accordance with advice from STAC that does not compromise safety, but draws on current knowledge of the virus and the protection afforded by vaccination.

Maintaining a strong test, trace, isolate discipline to suppress spread

Testing is still a vital tool in the control of COVID-19, which is why Ministers are offering the current twice-weekly testing to all Islanders over the age of 12, allowing Islanders to take responsibility for their own testing needs and make risk-based decisions.

As we move into the winter period, it remains vital that Jersey can identify active COVID-19 infections and limit spread through identification of Direct Contacts and isolation of positive cases.

There will still be rapid on-demand PCR tests, processed on-Island, for those displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or identified as Direct Contacts.

Being ready for rises in infections with resilience plans, particularly for our health system and education, and with contingency plans if needed

The Strategy sets out resilience plans in key areas such as education, hospital capacity, and keeping the Island's critical national infrastructure in operation so that Government is as prepared as possible to manage the enhanced pressures we might observe over winter.

The objective over the winter period in our schools is to ensure that all children and young people are engaged safely in face-to-face learning; to minimise any disruption; and to support and protect staff who have worked hard to give children and young people the best experience possible throughout the pandemic.

It is vital that we ensure our hospital and community health settings, including Primary Care, can cope with any enhanced challenges posed by the winter months. Health and Community Services plans are being developed based on:

- learning from previous winter planning and the impact from COVID-19 in 2020/21
- ensuring overall bed occupancy is within sustainable levels (~85%), alongside refreshed winter bed modelling.
- revising Emergency Department and Unscheduled Care capacity and demand modelling
- sustaining COVID Backlog activity
- ensuring sufficient 'Hot' and 'Cold' patient flow to manage any spike in COVID-19 or other high-risk infections such as norovirus and flu.

Supporting those suffering from Long COVID with a pathway of advice and services

A multi-disciplinary clinical and patient care pathway across primary, community and secondary care, to support those living with symptoms of Long COVID, is in development. The Long COVID pathway of advice and services will provide:

- information and awareness
- assessment of symptoms and testing to exclude other causes
- expert health professional review
- access to community support
- digital applications to support symptom management and self-help.

The Chief Minister, Senator John le Fondré, said: "By delivering on the commitments set out in the Winter Strategy, we can lower the risk of using greater restrictions to control infections. Our gains to date have not been easily won, but by working together we have managed the risk of

COVID-19 while sustaining daily life, learning and the economy with much lighter restrictions than many other countries.

"The emergence of the highly transmissible Delta variant has shown us that the pandemic can change things quickly and unexpectedly. Our progress is positive but there is still a high level of unpredictability, which will be heightened during the colder months.

"I would urge everyone to take up the offer of free Lateral Flow Tests. These are quick and easy to use and will provide you with peace of mind, as well as helping to protect those around you and the wider community.

"We know that the Pandemic Emergency phase in Jersey is not yet concluded. Vaccination has reduced risk but a range of threats, including new variants, vaccine waning, and the infectiousness of the Delta variant, all mean that the next few months are highly unpredictable.

"Long COVID is a serious, yet largely unforeseen, consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic which can cause significant ongoing illness. We recognise that some Islanders will already be living with ongoing symptoms from a previous COVID-19 infection and the number of those affected will continue to grow.

"As we approach winter, our abiding objective must be to keep Islanders safe, but in so doing, preserve and build on our hard-won gains. Our aim is not to return to more stringent restrictions unless the evidence shows they are required to prevent greater harm to lives and livelihoods.

"The Strategy sets out a phased response if we must deploy contingency measures: our first response will be to make voluntary requests of Islanders, such as working from home.

"Legal restrictions will be our very last resort, and only used if we feel they are absolutely necessary. Beyond the risks that this winter presents, it is the Government's firm intention to continue scaling back measures."

Deputy Chief Minister, Senator Lyndon Farnham, said: "The changes we are proposing today are based upon the mitigations we have in place, including our excellent vaccination and booster coverage, which is providing additional protection against the virus as we progress through the pandemic.

"Every passenger entering Jersey will need to meet safety criteria which provides a level of protection – whether that's vaccination, recent recovery, pre-departure test or testing on arrival."

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Notes to Editors

- For further information, please contact the press office on 01534 440430 or pressoffice@gov.je