

Friday, 28 January

EMBARGOED UNTIL 3PM

## Ministers announce plans for COVID-19 de-escalation

Competent Authority Ministers have announced a phased approach to the de-escalation of Jersey's COVID-19 measures, after taking advice from Public Health in consultation with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC).

The plans have been agreed after considering the latest scientific evidence, both internationally and locally, which strongly indicates a significantly reduced risk of severe illness from the Omicron variant. In making their decision, Ministers have considered this evidence alongside the high levels of protection afforded by vaccination, and analysis provided by Jersey's public health team.

Ministers have agreed the following approach for Jersey's de-escalation:

- mask legislation will be removed from 00:01 on Tuesday 1 February
- working from home guidance ends at 00:01 on Tuesday 1 February
- the legal requirement for businesses to collect contact details for contact tracing purposes ends at 00:01 on Tuesday 1 February
- all requirements under the Safer Travel Policy will be removed on Monday 7 February
- government-led contact tracing in the community, businesses, and schools ends on Monday 7 February
- mandatory isolation requirement for people who test positive will be removed and replaced with guidance by Thursday 31 March
- guidance on Lateral Flow testing will be amended - to recommend twice weekly home-testing by all Islanders and daily home testing for those attending schools and healthcare settings
- all COVID-19 legislation will be reviewed and removed as required.

Ministers will publish a Post-Emergency COVID-19 Strategy by the end of next month which will update their approach to managing COVID-19.

The ability to consider de-escalating the Island's COVID response is underpinned by the evidence of reduced risk and Islanders' commitment to public health measures, in particular the vaccination programme.

Vaccination is the main reason that de-escalation in Jersey is now possible. The cooperation of Islanders who continue to stay up to date with their vaccination schedule means positive cases

have been manageable, the Island's critical services have continued to function, and lives are protected.

64% of all eligible Islanders (12 years+) are now fully vaccinated, and more than 88% of Islanders aged over 50 are fully vaccinated with a booster dose.

In addition, scientific evidence confirms that the Omicron variant has a less severe impact on a person's health and the associated fatality rate is greatly reduced. The combined effect of rising vaccination coverage and diminished severity of the Omicron variant has meant that our fatality rate has fallen in Jersey from more than one in one hundred, in January 2021, to fewer than one in one thousand now in January 2022.

In the coming weeks and months, Ministers will continue to monitor all aspects of the COVID response to ensure the approach is proportionate and effectively safeguards all Islanders.

#### Removal of mask legislation and working from home guidance

From 00:01 on Tuesday 1 February, the legal requirement to use face masks will be removed, in all settings, under the COVID-19 Workplace Restrictions Order 2020. This means masks will no longer be required by law in any setting, although individual business policies may still apply. Public health recommendations will remain in place, depending on the prevailing risk.

Separate policies will remain for health care and education settings, where mask policies will be continued as required.

The recommendation for Islanders to work from home where possible is removed with effect from Tuesday 1 February at 00:01. Advice for businesses to consider working from home as part of business continuity planning will be retained in accordance with prevailing risk.

#### Suspension of the Safer Travel Policy

By Monday 7 February, all current requirements under Jersey's Safer Travel policy will be suspended, with a return to unrestricted, pre-pandemic inbound travel arrangements, including:

- removal of all testing and isolation requirements for all arriving passengers
- removal of the requirement to complete a pre-departure travel form before arriving in Jersey for all passengers.

The suspension of border restrictions represents a proportionate de-escalation based on the current assessment of risk as advised by STAC. Surveillance for emerging threats will continue, with the option of a return to border measures in the event of a significant escalation in risk or the emergence of high-risk new variants in the future.

#### Removal of mandatory isolation for people who test positive (replaced by guidance)

By Thursday 31 March, the mandatory isolation requirement for positive cases will cease. Mandatory isolation will be replaced with public health guidance. Further details of the guidance will be announced in due course, but the shift will focus on high quality guidance and self-administered LFTs enabling Islanders to safely manage their own health decisions. Separate policies will remain for health care and education settings.

Until this time, the legal requirement to isolate after a positive test will remain in place with the guidance and rules for when to leave isolation also remaining unchanged.

## Testing

PCR testing for symptomatic individuals and those with a positive LFT test will remain. Islanders will continue to be advised to isolate, book and attend a PCR test if they experience COVID-19 symptoms, and all Islanders should continue to test themselves regularly with LFTs, particularly as many cases are asymptomatic.

Any Islander who tests positive on an LFT will be asked to continue to register their positive test on the online portal and attend for a confirmatory PCR test.

The guidance to report negative LFT results will cease, except as part of the process to release early from isolation.

## Replacing contact tracing with voluntary self-notification of contacts

On Monday 7 February, Government-led contact tracing will cease. Islanders who test positive will be advised to notify the individuals they have been in contact with and advise them to start 10 days of LFT tests. It will also remain possible to notify close contacts via the Jersey COVID Alert proximity app. This approach aligns with our shift to enabling Islanders to manage their own health arrangements and speeds up the notification process.

In addition, from Tuesday 1 February, the legal requirement for businesses to collect contact details for contact tracing purposes will also cease.

## Schools

From Monday 7 February, to support resilience, guidance will recommend that every child, young person and member of staff takes a daily lateral flow test before attending an education setting. This universal testing will replace the need for Government or schools-led contact tracing for young people by providing a consistent and thorough universal screening approach.

In addition, the evidence supporting the importance of good ventilation in reducing risk of transmission is now very strong. For this reason, installing CO2 monitoring and air filtration systems will be a priority to limit transmission wherever possible.

Vaccination promotion for young people aged 12 to 18 years old will continue within education settings to ensure that maximum vaccination coverage among young people is achieved.

Currently, prevalence of COVID-19 remains high in schools, with around half of cases being found in education settings. Public Health alongside Children, Young, People, Education and Skills department will be clarifying specific policies for education settings, including the use of masks and the review of school bubbles, details of which will follow in the coming weeks.

## Vaccination

Vaccination remains the key defence against COVID-19 and is the most fundamental reason that de-escalation in Jersey is now possible.

With 88% of Islanders aged over 50 years old now fully vaccinated with a booster dose, the Vaccination Centre will be moving to a 5-day service opening Tuesday to Saturday each week, starting from Sunday 30 January.

It is important that all Islanders are aware that first, second and booster doses remain available at the Vaccination Centre. If any Islanders are yet to get their first, second or booster dose they are encouraged to book an appointment. If Islanders are not sure what doses they are eligible for, they should call the Coronavirus Helpline to ensure they have the optimal protection that a full vaccination schedule provides.

Islanders can also stay up to date with the Vaccination Programme by visiting [gov.je/vaccine](https://gov.je/vaccine).

The programme continues to follow the advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and the UK's Chief Medical Officers.

## Legislation

Ministers have committed to an immediate review of all COVID specific legislation under the principle of only retaining those powers necessary within the current risk context or for contingency planning purposes.

Chief Minister, Senator John Le Fondré, said:

"Following advice from Public Health in consultation with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, Ministers have agreed that we are at the right stage to start relaxing COVID-19 measures over the next two months, starting from next week.

"This de-escalation reflects the progress we have made as an Island; Jersey has come a long way since March 2020 - at the start of the pandemic. Over this time, we have worked with Islanders to safeguard our collective public health, we have worked with businesses to protect jobs and livelihoods, and we have worked with local charities to support vulnerable Islanders.

"Part of the de-escalation is to change the use of Competent Authority Ministers as key individual Ministerial roles within the Post Emergency Strategy are clarified. We have asked officers to begin working on the Strategy and expect that this will be published by the end of next month.

"We are largely in the position that we are in today thanks to the cooperation and support Islanders have given the vaccination programme and ensuring they are getting fully vaccinated. It is vital that this is upheld, and I want to remind Islanders that the Vaccination Centre remains open for first, second and booster doses, so please do not hesitate to stay up to date with your vaccination schedule."

Minister for Health and Social Services, Deputy Richard Renouf, said:

"Thanks to the cooperation from Islanders, we are now able to introduce a phased removal of restrictions. It is important to remember that COVID-19 has not gone away but in the context of Jersey, we are at a good stage to change how the virus is managed.

"Of course, vaccination has greatly changed the context of the pandemic for Islanders and has put us in a position where we are protecting our critical services, protecting ourselves from developing severe illness, and reducing the spread of infection to others. I am extremely thankful to our Island community who have attended for their vaccination and followed the guidance – this has taken us to where we are today.

"I understand that some vulnerable Islanders might be concerned about the plans for de-escalation, particularly those who are vulnerable or at risk. I would like to reassure Islanders that they can continue to use the guidance available to them and that the current prevailing disease context is one that contains far less risk than it once did. In addition to the protection of vaccination, we will also be rolling out the use of an anti-viral drug, Molnupiravir, in the coming week to ensure our Island's most vulnerable can receive treatment for COVID, if required, which will provide an added level of protection for Islanders who are more vulnerable.

"It is vital that if we are to maintain a post emergency state where there are no legal measures, that Islanders keep up to date with their vaccination schedule, continue testing themselves regularly with lateral flow tests, and responsibly manage their own risks and the risk they pose to others."

Deputy Medical Officer for Health, Dr Ivan Muscat, said:

"The past two years have been about managing the unpredictable nature of COVID-19 and implementing measures to keep Islanders safe, while trying to remain proportionate at all times. We now reach the stage where we can de-escalate some of our COVID-19 measures due to vaccination. I must stress that it is vaccination protection that had brought us to this point and will allow us to pursue further de-escalation going forward.

"The UK Health Security Agency's recent data and evidence gives a high level of confidence that the intrinsic severity of the Omicron variant is lower compared to previous variants. The reduced severity of disease, coupled with the excellent vaccination coverage we have achieved, therefore poses a reduced risk to the health of Islanders - although the risk is higher for those who are unvaccinated.

"Studies also show that the relative risk of hospitalisation for adult Omicron positive cases compared to Delta positive cases is reduced; this is both likely due to the milder nature of the variant and the protection provided from vaccination and previous infection.

"The current situation in Jersey and many other jurisdictions as a result of Omicron being the dominant variant and the majority of people being fully vaccinated means that we are in a good position to gradually remove legal measures that are no longer as significant.

"However, it is vital that Islanders keep up to date with their vaccination schedule, regularly use LFT tests and continue to follow Public Health guidance. All of these responses remain in place, and we must maintain good vaccination protection despite very many measures being de-escalated, to ensure we continue to move in the right direction."

Deputy Chief Minister, Senator Lyndon Farnham, said:

"Following the advice of Public Health and STAC, I am pleased that we are beginning to remove some of the restrictions that have been part of our lives over the past two years. The continued support of Islanders, particularly with our vaccination programme, means that we have been moving in the right direction and are now able to rely less on enforced measures.

"Our COVID response was formed in the context of a high threat emergency. Over the last two years, we have always adapted to ensure our response has been proportionate to the level of risk posed by the virus. In line with other jurisdictions, there is an opportunity for a strategic reset and repositioning based on the stage of the pandemic we are now in. The balance of evidence suggests that significant de-escalation is appropriate and proportionate.

"In just over a week, we will be removing the requirements under the Safer Travel Policy and returning to pre-pandemic inbound travel arrangements. I hope that this will help islanders to reconnect with loved ones and will mean that travel over the half term period will be easier for families. Also, I'm sure this will be welcomed by many Islanders and businesses who will be welcoming tourists as we head towards the Spring season.

"Our business support has been updated throughout the pandemic in response to changes in public health policy, to support those business sectors which continue to be impacted. I hope today's announcement on de-escalation will come as welcome news to these businesses, and I would like to remind businesses that the Visitor Accommodation Support Scheme, Visitor Attractions and Events Scheme and the Fixed Cost Support Scheme remain open for claims until the end of March 2022.

"Earlier this month we expanded the number of sectors eligible to claim under the Fixed Cost Support Scheme for the months of December and January.

"Phase 7 of the Co-Funded Payroll Scheme was reintroduced for December and January in response to the public health measures put in place at that time, and claims for January can be submitted from 1 February."

Minister for Education, Deputy Scott Wickenden, said:

"While we are seeing cases increase within school settings, the addition of air filtration units within education settings to support good ventilation is a priority to limit transmission wherever possible. The evidence supporting the importance of good ventilation in reducing risk of transmission is now very strong and I am pleased that these units will be installed very soon.

"Universal testing for all students and staff, replacing school-led contact tracing, will provide consistent screening in education settings as we move forward in our pandemic response. I would like to emphasise how important it is for every child and member of staff to be taking a daily test at home before attending school to limit transmission wherever possible. We will be providing clear communication on the new testing policies to staff and students in advance of 7 February.

"Vaccination remains our best form of defence to keep cases low within education settings, and I welcome the continued promotion of vaccination for young people aged 12 to 18 years old to ensure that maximum vaccination coverage among young people is achieved.

I look forward to working with Public Health and Children, Young, People, Education and Skills to clarify the specific policies for education settings, including the use of masks and the review of school bubbles, details of which will follow in the coming weeks."