Twitter Thread by The SNP



The SNP
@theSNP

First Minister @NicolaSturgeon: "Good afternoon, thank you for joining us. I'll give you some warning in advance - my update is going to be slightly longer than normal today because I've got a few updates I'm going to cover."

NS: "I'm also going to touch a little bit on Christmas, which I know is of huge interest to everyone. But firstly, as usual, I will cover today's statistics."

NS: "There were 689 positive cases reported yesterday, which is 5.9% of the total number of tests and means that the total tally of confirmed cases now is 108,438."

NS: "140 of today's new cases were in Lothian, 109 in Greater Glasgow & Clyde, 92 in Lanarkshire and 91 in Ayrshire & Arran, and the remaining cases are spread across 8 other health board areas."

NS: "1,031 people are currently in hospital which is an increase of 35 from yesterday. 49 people are in intensive care, which is 4 more than yesterday."

NS: "And I'm sorry to report that 38 additional deaths have been registered in the past 24 hours of patients who first tested positive over the previous 28 day period."

NS: "The total number of deaths under that daily measurement, therefore, is now 4,173."

NS: "However, National Records of Scotland has just published its usual weekly update, which as well as deaths of people who had been confirmed through a test as having Covid also includes cases where Covid is a suspected or contributory cause of death."

NS: "Today's update shows that, by last Sunday just past, the total number of registered deaths linked to Covid under that wider definition was 6,092."

NS: "224 of those deaths were registered last week - that is 8 fewer than in the previous week. 154 of those deaths occurred in hospitals, 62 at care homes, and 8 at home or in other non-institutional settings."

NS: "The fact that the death toll, under this wider measurement, has now passed 6,000 is clearly another reminder of the devastating impact that Covid has had, and it is another very distressing milestone."

NS: "Every single one of these deaths is a source of grief and heartbreak to a family somewhere across the country, so yet again today I want to send my thoughts and my condolences to everyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one during the course of the pandemic so far."

NS: "In a moment, Dr Steedman, the Chief Medical Officer, is going to provide an update on our vaccination programme. Before then, I have three issues I want to update you on as briefly as I can."

NS: "The first is an issue I have to give an update on relating to the Protect Scotland app. This is an update that is relevant to around 900 people, who were advised by the app to self-isolate for 10 days..."

NS: "..and who received that notification between one minute past midnight on Monday morning, and 8:30am on Tuesday morning."

NS: "During that 32.5 hour period we would normally expect, given current prevalence of the virus, around 250 notifications to be issued."

NS: "Instead, 900 notifications were issued and we have realised this was because during an upgrade to the app it was configured in an overly sensitive way over that period."

NS: "I want to reassure people that the issue has been identified and has now been fixed, but it does mean that some people will have received notifications in that period who do not actually need to self-isolate."

NS: "This is a message to anyone who was notified to self-isolate between 00:01 on Monday morning and 08:30 on Tuesday morning."

NS: "If you got that notification telling you to self-isolate, please call the National Contact Tracing Centre.

That's on 0800 030 8012."

NS: "That will enable you to speak to a specialised contact tracer to see whether or not you actually need to self-isolate. If you're one of the people who have been notified incorrectly, they will advise you of that."

NS: "That's something I obviously felt the need to update people on today but I want to end this update with an assurance that the app has been working really well at all other times."

NS: "This was a one-off blip as a result of an upgrade to the app, and it has now been fixed. If you have received a notification at any other time outside the time period I've just given today, please follow the app's advice as normal and self-isolate."

NS: "Second issue I want to cover today is that Public Health Scotland has, as it normally does on a Wednesday, published a number of reports. However, today, some of those reports show the impact of Covid on school staff and young people."

NS: "Obviously we are very keen to help reassure young people, parents, and teachers, about the safety of schools, that we understand more fully any impact on our schools."

NS: "Amongst other things, and these are complex, statistical reports that I know journalists and others will want to take a bit of time to consider, but among other things they show that almost two-thirds of schools have not had any pupil cases of Covid."

NS: "As you might expect, that's an overall figure. The figure is different when we look at just secondary schools, where around two-thirds of schools have had recorded cases. Those figures are different in areas where the level of prevalence in the general population is higher."

NS: "However even here, the reports show that the impact of Covid has often been relatively limited. For example, in the final week of the survey, fewer than one-fifth of secondary schools had more than one cases of Covid."

NS: "The data also looks in some detail at the impact on staff in schools, which I know has been and continues to be an issue of concern for teachers and other adults working in schools."

NS: "Looking at the data since August, when schools reopened, what the report shows, amongst other things, is there is no evidence of any difference in the risk of hospitalisation for teachers when compared to the general population."

NS: "In fact, the risk of severe Covid actually seems to be lower in teachers than the population as a whole, and antibody test results for education staff were similar to the results for the general adult population."

NS: "Taken together - and there's a lot more in these reports than the headlines I have just shared with you, and there will be detailed questions as people have the chance to consider these reports fully..."

NS: "But taken together, they are an important contribution to our understanding of how Covid is affecting students and education staff, and in my view, while we will continue to listen very carefully to the views of teachers and others..."

NS: "..they support the view that it has been right for schools to remain open. But I hope the fact we are ensuring this kind of work is being done is also a demonstration of the fact that we are not complacent about the risks of Covid anywhere..."

NS: "..and we want to properly understand what the impact is in schools, and on pupils and teachers, so that that can continue to inform our thinking."

NS: "And obviously, what these reports do show adds up to a tribute to the vast amount of work that has gone into ensuring schools can be open, and be open safely."

NS: "So the final point I want to make on this - and before I do this let me say I don't want to and never will seek to underplay how difficult and stressful a term this has been for pupils, parents, and for all teachers, school leaders and staff..."

NS: "..but notwithstanding that, I think the findings in these reports do underline what a very good and important job all of these people have done."

NS: "As we approach the end of this term I want to take the opportunity to thank each and every one of them. I know this, for teachers in particular and others who work in school, this has been a particularly stressful time. My grateful thanks are with all of you."

NS: "Public Health Scotland has also released figures on our pilots for community testing, mass community testing of people who don't have symptoms of Covid. They show that more than 15,000 tests of asymptomatic people were carried out in those pilots."

NS: "228 of these tests were positive. Those cases may not otherwise have been identified, so the pilots do demonstrate that asymptomatic testing can help us break chains of transmission..."

NS: "..and we will be considering the lessons of these pilots as we expand asymptomatic testing into the new year and further into the future."

NS: "The final point I want to cover today, and I want to take a little bit of time on this, is arrangements for Christmas."

NS: "I took part in four nations discussions yesterday, and again this morning, with the UK Government, and the governments of Wales and Northern Ireland."

NS: "These discussions - the fact they have happened - reflect that, in parts of the UK, cases are rising again, and in some parts of the UK, rising quite rapidly."

NS: "Now, Scotland's case levels remain at the moment lower than in the other nations, but even so, we can't be complacent and we need to consider the evolving situation."

NS: "We intend to issue updated guidance later today, and we hope that this will be agreed in a four nations basis. That is what we are working towards and those discussions are continuing, so they have not, at the time I came down to do this briefing, concluded yet."

NS: "But I want today, because I know there is intense and understandable interest in this, so I want to just run through some of the principles the Scottish Government is working on."

NS: "Firstly, the pragmatic considerations that led us to agree some limited flexibility over Christmas have not gone away."

NS: "We recognise that, in some cases, the isolation caused by being alone over Christmas will, in itself, cause harm to people's welfare..."

NS: "..and we understand that some people will simply not be prepared to leave loved ones alone over the whole Christmas period, perhaps especially on Christmas day."

NS: "I also recognise that some people will have already made plans for Christmas. It's for those reasons that we decided, across the four nations, to give people some clear boundaries around the Christmas period..."

NS: "..rather than seek to prohibit any interaction altogether or, on the other hand, risk everyone just trying to set their own boundaries."

NS: "On balance, we - and I - think that is the right approach to take. So we don't intend to take away the flexibility."

NS: "That, in my view, wouldn't be fair at this stage, and it wouldn't be realistic either. It may risk undermining, rather than strengthening, compliance with the overall Covid guidance."

NS: "However, we in the Scottish Government do intend to strengthen the guidance we give to people about whether, and how, we should make use of the flexibility."

NS: "The guidance in Scotland is already a bit tighter than elsewhere, but we hope we can come to a four nations agreement on a clear and united message to the public."

NS: "But let me be clear, not all of what I'm about to say right now is yet agreed with other nations, and I cannot and would not try to speak for them..."

NS: "..but I wanted to set out for you the key elements of the advice that the Scottish Government has been and will continue to give over the period ahead."

NS: "Firstly, and unequivocally, the safest way to spend Christmas this year for you and those you love is to stay within your own household, and your own home. My strong recommendation is that this is what you should do if at all possible."

NS: "Any interaction you do have with another household should, if at all possible, be outdoors - but if you do consider it essential to meet indoors with someone from another household, you should limit both the duration and the numbers as much as possible."

NS: "This is the point I want to stress in particular. The five-day relaxation is a window of opportunity during which you can meet. It's not a period in which we think it is safe or sensible to get together for."

NS: "You should see it as a maximum, not a target. My recommendation is that if you do form a bubble, you should not meet up with people in it any more than on one day in that period, if possible, and you should not stay overnight unless it is unavoidable."

NS: "You should also limit numbers as far as possible - three households is a maximum that tries to account for the fact that families come in all shapes and sizes, but two would be better. In short, if you have to form a bubble, keep it as small as

possible."

NS: "In Scotland we have already advised a limit of 8 people, and I recommend that you stay firmly within that if you do feel the need to form a bubble, and again, the smaller, the better."

NS: "And lastly, we will recommend against travel from high-prevalence areas to low-prevalence areas of the UK. We'll issue more detail on that shortly."

NS: "Also, as I stressed on Monday, if you are intending to form a Christmas bubble you should already be trying to reduce any unnecessary social contacts."

NS: "And this year, for most people, all of what I've just run through will be the safer choices to make and I would encourage everybody to think very carefully about that."

NS: "If you haven't made plans to form a bubble yet, please don't. If you're still swithering, please decide against. And if you have made plans, but think they're not really essential, perhaps think about postponing until later in the year."

NS: "But if you believe your plans ARE essential, I understand that but I'm asking you to follow all of the advice I've just set out. Please also follow all the guidance on what to do when you are indoors."

NS: "That means keeping safe distance as much as possible, washing your hands and surfaces regularly, keeping windows open and avoiding eating from the same dishes."

NS: "I know this is incredibly hard for everyone. I have to say, I hate with every fibre of my being standing here trying to regulate how you spend Christmas."

NS: "I wish it was an easier or a more binary decision - just let people meet as they wish or ban it all together - but it is more complex than that. We're all human beings, with human emotions, and we're all going through a really tough time right now."

NS: "No leader trying to encourage maximum compliance with restrictions can simply ignore all of that. But equally, I have a duty to reach the best balance we can and to be straight about what, within the boundaries of the law, we are recommending."

NS: "The reality is that this Christmas simply can't be normal, but we have every reason to hope that next year's will be much more normal.

So hard though it is now, let us all try to keep that in mind."

NS: "We're just about to hear, after all, an update on the vaccination programme from the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, and that does give us real hope of being able to enjoy safer meetings with our loved ones in the not-too-distant future."

NS: "It means that, for this Christmas, the best thing we can all do is help keep our loved ones as safe as possible. Of course, between now and Christmas, and then after the Christmas period, we should all stick to the current rules and guidelines."

NS: "If you're in any doubt about what they are, use the postcode checker on the @scotgov website. But outside of island communities, no-one should be meeting in other people's houses just now."

NS: "If you do meet other people outside just now, or in indoor public places, the limit is 6 people from a maximum of 2 households."

NS: "Try to work from home if you can. Download the app. Avoid car-sharing."

NS: "And remember FACTS - face coverings, avoid crowded places, clean your hands and surfaces regularly, keep a two-metre distance, and self-isolate and get tested if you have any symptoms."

NS: "Doing all of this is tedious, it's hard, it's distressing, it's painful, increasingly so for all of us. But it is necessary to try, as we hopefully approach this final stretch of this horrible pandemic, keep ourselves and our loved ones as safe as possible."

NS: "Thank you for listening, and we will continue to update on any four nations discussions on this or on any other matters as we go through the days to come."