# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Review of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No.5) (Wales) Regulations 2020** |
| **DATE** | **27 May 2022** |
| **BY** | **First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS** |

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 5) (Wales) Regulations 2020 require a review of the coronavirus regulations to be undertaken every three weeks. The most recent three-week review was due to be completed by 26 May.

Over the last three weeks, the public health situation has continued to improve. The latest results from the ONS Coronavirus Infection Survey show the percentage of people testing positive for Covid-19 in Wales is falling. A similar trend in declining community transmission is also seen across the UK.

The number of Covid-19-related patients in hospital has also fallen over the last three weeks to less than 700 and is now at its lowest level since 28 December 2021. This downward trend is encouraging, but the NHS remains under pressure from a combination of emergency and pandemic pressures, with a significant number of Covid-related staff absences.

In the last week, the four UK chief medical officers and the NHS England medical director have recommended the UK’s Covid alert level should move from level four to level three on the basis that the current BA.2 omicron wave is subsiding.

However, they have warned we can expect cases to increase as a result of new coronavirus variants – BA.4 and BA.5. However, the four UK chief medical officers have said it is unlikely that these will lead to significant direct Covid pressures in the immediate future.

The pandemic is not over but the current public health situation is consistent with the Covid Stable scenario as set out in our plan *Together for a Safer Future*.

After carefully reviewing all the latest public health evidence, together with the advice from Wales’ Chief Medical Officer and our Technical Advisory Cell, the Cabinet has decided that the last remaining legal restriction, which requires face coverings to be worn in indoor public areas of health and social care settings, will end.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No.5) (Wales) Regulations 2020 will expire at the end of the day on 30 May.

We will continue to strongly recommend everyone attending health settings in Wales wears a face covering to help protect the most vulnerable and staff working in these settings.

Wearing a face covering in crowded indoor public places and following other protective behaviours, including getting vaccinated, maintaining good hand hygiene, self-isolating when you have symptoms of Covid-19 and increasing ventilation when indoors, can help reduce the transmission of coronavirus and keep us all safe.

Vaccination remains our best defence against coronavirus. It has weakened the link between the virus and serious illness and hospitalisation and I strongly urge everyone eligible to take up their vaccines and boosters if they have not already done so.

We will continue to monitor the public health situation and the BA.4 and BA.5 variants so we are able to respond quickly to any changes to keep Wales safe.