# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Review of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No.5) (Wales) Regulations 2020** |
| **DATE** | **7 January 2022** |
| **BY** | **First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS** |

The Cabinet has moved to a weekly review of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 5) (Wales) Regulations 2020. This is in response to the rapidly evolving public health situation following the arrival and spread of the omicron variant across the UK.

Omicron is now the dominant form of the virus in Wales and cases are rising sharply. Cases are far higher now than they were at the peak of the previous waves. Rates are highest among 20 to 40-year-olds, but we are also seeing rises in older age groups. The latest figures show there are more than 2,200 cases per 100,000 people across Wales. This equates to approximately one person in every 20. This is in line with our modelling.

The rapid rise in cases caused by the omicron wave means we are all facing a difficult month ahead. The full impact of population mixing over the Christmas and New Year period is yet to be seen in the data, as is any impact of the return of children to schools, which will begin in earnest from next week. We must be prepared for cases to rise even higher, just as they have elsewhere in the UK.

As cases rise steeply in the community, the number of people admitted to hospital with Covid-19 is also rising. The latest figures show there are around 990 Covid-19 patients in our hospitals – a rise of 43% compared to last week and the highest number since last March.

Omicron is putting significant pressure on the NHS at the busiest time of the year – not just from rising hospital admissions but through staff absences. Staff sickness levels are similarly rising in other public services.

Following a review of the coronavirus regulations this week, Wales will remain at alert level two with the current protections in place for the time being. We will continue to closely monitor the situation.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Senedd returns I would be happy to do so.