# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Review of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No.5) (Wales) Regulations 2020** |
| **DATE** | **30 December 2021** |
| **BY** | **First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS** |

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 5) (Wales) Regulations 2020 require a review of the coronavirus protections is undertaken every three weeks.

Since the last formal review of the regulations, the Cabinet has moved to a weekly review in response to the rapidly evolving public health situation and the emergence of the omicron variant.

Today, a review has taken place of the public health situation over the Christmas period. It has deteriorated in the last week as the omicron wave has arrived. We have seen a marked rise in cases of coronavirus – the majority are likely to be caused by the omicron variant.

This is similar to the position in the rest of the UK.

Over the last few days, record numbers of infections have been identified and the overall seven-day case rate has risen to more than 1,000 cases per 100,000 people across Wales.

Cases are highest among 20 to 29-year-olds and 30 to 39-year-olds. We are also starting to see the cases rates increase in the older age groups.

Hospitalisations remain lower than in previous waves, but these too are starting to increase. The overall Covid-19 bed occupancy has grown by a third over the Christmas period. This is a combination of both omicron and delta cases.

The number of confirmed Covid-19 patients in hospital has also increased to 446 on 29 December. This is 49% higher than the same day last week. We have not seen a rise in the number of Covid-19 patients needing critical care.

Enormous efforts have been made to provide booster vaccines to all eligible adults in the run-up to Christmas – almost 1.6m people have received a booster.

The concentrated attention on vaccination has also led to increases in the number of people coming forward for first and second vaccinations in December. It is never too late to be vaccinated in Wales.

I want to place on record my thanks to all those who have given up their time this Christmas to help protect others, and to all those people, in every part of Wales who have made coming forward for vaccination their priority too.

If you have not yet had your booster please make it a priority. It is the most important thing you can do to protect yourself against this awful virus.

Demand for PCR tests and for lateral flow devices continues to rise and has reached new record levels. Wales has a significant stock of lateral flow tests, sufficient to meet our needs over the weeks ahead.

The Health Minister has agreed today to loan a further four million such tests to the English NHS, bringing that mutual aid to 10 million lateral flow tests.

Distribution of lateral flow test kits through home delivery and pharmacies remains the responsibility of the UK Government and we are working with it, as it increases the capacity of the system.

Wales moved to alert level two on Boxing Day. The public health situation remains very volatile and the Christmas period is always one when collecting and analysing data is challenging.

Against this background, the outcome of the review is that we will continue with the current arrangements for alert level two protections in Wales, while continuing to closely monitor the situation.

The Health Minister published a written statement on 23 December about reducing the self-isolation period from 10 to seven days, on the basis of two negative lateral flow tests taken on days six and seven, from 5 January.

We will introduce this change tomorrow (31 December).

This means people who have tested positive for Covid-19 must self-isolate for seven days. On days six and seven of their self-isolation period they should take lateral flow tests and if these tests – taken 24 hours apart – are positive, they should continue to self-isolate.

We are bringing the change forward because the balance of harms has changed and the rising number of cases has begun to have an impact on the number of people, in critical jobs, who are excluded from the workplace because of self-isolation.

The Cabinet will continue to review the position in Wales on a weekly basis, as we see the omicron variant take hold across Wales. Given the seriousness of the threat the virus poses, it remains vitally important that each one of us continues to take all those simple precautions which will help to slow down the spread of the virus and the risks it poses to all of us.

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.