Twitter Thread by The SNP



The SNP
@theSNP

First Minister @NicolaSturgeon: "I want to update Parliament on Cabinet's review of the current lockdown restrictions which took place this morning."

NS: "Let me confirm at the outset that - with one limited exception - I will not be announcing any immediate changes to the current lockdown restrictions."

NS: "The core stay at home requirement will remain in place until at least the beginning of March - and possibly for a further period beyond that although not for any longer than is absolutely necessary."

NS: "I will however confirm that the phased and gradual return to school that I said we were hopeful about when I updated Parliament two weeks ago will go ahead as planned from Monday."

NS: "I will say more about this - and about the importance of carefully implementing and monitoring it - later.

In addition, I will give an assessment of the current state of the pandemic."

NS: "And I will signal when and how we hope to give an indication of the criteria for beginning our exit from lockdown, and the order in which we will be aiming to do so, when the time is right."

NS "First, though, I will give a brief summary of the latest statistics.

The total number of positive cases reported yesterday was 773.

This represents 6% of all tests carried out, and means the overall number of cases is now 193,148."

NS: "1,383 people are now in hospital - 45 fewer than yesterday.

And 100 people are in intensive care, 2 fewer than yesterday."

NS: "I regret to report that in the last 24 hours, a further 49 deaths have been registered of patients who first tested positive over the previous 28 days. The total number of deaths, under this daily measurement, is now 6,764."

NS: "Once again, my condolences go to all those who have lost a loved one."

NS: "Let me now turn to an update on the vaccination programme.

As of 8:30 this morning, 1,288,004 people in Scotland had received their first dose of the vaccine."

NS: "That is an increase of 32,814 since yesterday.

It means that we have now given a first dose of vaccine to 28% of the adult population in Scotland."

NS: "And we have met our mid-February target to offer the first dose of the vaccine to everyone over 70 and everyone with an extreme clinical vulnerability - there will be some overlap of these groups, but in total that is groups 1 to 4 of the JCVI priority list."

NS: "That is extremely good news. However, expressing it in the way I have just done actually understates the scale of the achievement.

Vaccination hasn’t simply been offered to everyone in these categories."

NS: "Almost everyone in these groups has had the first dose of the vaccine. Uptake rates have been exceptional.

We have administered first doses to virtually all residents in older people’s care homes, and more than 90% of residents in all care homes."

NS: "Virtually all of the over 80-year-olds living in the community have received the first dose.

So too have 94% of those in the 70 to 79-year-old age group."

NS: "In addition, though this wasn’t part of the mid February target, we have also now vaccinated 58% of 65 to 69-year-olds - the JVCI’s priority group 5."

NS: "Now, in any large scale programme, there are bound to be some hiccups, so if you are over 70 or have an extreme clinical vulnerability and you haven’t yet heard about your vaccine..."

NS: "..it may be that your letter has gone astray or that some other administrative problem has occurred.

So please get in touch with your GP, call the helpline or, as a last resort, email me. The address is firstminister@gov.scot."

NS: "Overall, though, the progress of the vaccination programme so far is outstanding and I want to thank everyone planning and delivering the programme and everyone who has come forward to be vaccinated."

NS: "However, please remember that even if you have had the vaccine, you must still follow all the lockdown rules.

The protection from the first dose doesn't kick in for 2-3 weeks and, even then, we don't know exactly what impact it will have on transmission of the virus."

NS: "However, in the weeks ahead, we are very hopeful that vaccination will start to have a significant impact in reducing the number of people who die from Covid."

NS: "In fact, we think it is already having an effect in care homes, where vaccines started being administered in the first half of December.

At the end of December, more than a third of all Covid deaths - 34% to be precise - took place in care homes."

NS: "However, in the most recent figures, that proportion had fallen to 18%."

NS: "As I have said before, we are in a race between the virus and the vaccine.

I think we do have much more reason to be hopeful now than we did just a few weeks ago that this is a race we can and we will ultimately win - if we are prepared to stick with it."

NS: "In the last few weeks, as the figures I've just reported show, we have been speeding up the vaccination programme.

But at the same time we have also been slowing down the virus.

Lockdown has been working."

NS: "In the first week of January, an average of more than 2,300 new cases a day were being recorded in Scotland.

The most recent figure is 810. That is a significant and sustained fall."

NS: "As a result, we are now seeing fewer Covid patients in hospital and intensive care - although it's important to be very clear that our health service remains under very severe pressure."

NS: "Test positivity has also declined significantly - from around 11% at the start of January, to around 6% now."

NS: "All of this – together with our progress on vaccination - is extremely good news.

But of course, and as always, it has to be seen in context.

Case numbers have been falling because we have been in lockdown."

NS: "And – even after 6 weeks of lockdown - they have only just returned to the levels that were being recorded in early December.

In addition, we think we are seeing some signs that cases are falling more slowly now than they was the case a few weeks ago."

NS: "A key factor here is likely to be that the new, more infectious, variant of the virus is accounting for an increasing proportion of all new cases - as of now, the new variant is responsible for more than 80% of all new cases being identified."

NS: "And of course we already know – from experience in the autumn, and again in December - how easily the virus can run away from us when there is already a high baseline of transmission within the community."

NS: "All of that means that the situation we are in right now, while better and improved, is still very fragile.

I know that is frustrating and can seem counter-intuitive."

NS: "Over the last few weeks the sacrifices everyone has continued to make have helped bring about good progress. All of the news has been very encouraging. However, our room for manoeuvre still remains limited."

NS: "Even a slight easing of restrictions could cause cases to start rising rapidly again."

NS: "Even if the older and more vulnerable people in the population now have additional protection from the vaccine, we know that more virus circulating in the community would still put huge pressure on the NHS."

NS: "It would also cause many more people to fall ill - including younger people who we know can be vulnerable to what is called ‘long Covid’."

NS: "And, in addition, we know that when community transmission is high and rising, the risk of the virus mutating and new variants emerging is at its most acute."

NS: "So all of these reasons mean that, notwithstanding the good progress made, for a period yet we continue to require to be extremely cautious. We need to work hard to drive infection rates down as low as possible and keep them low."

NS: "Of course, all of that said, we know that we cannot continue in lockdown indefinitely."

NS: "We need to balance all the different factors and plan a gradual, phased return to as much normality as possible.

That is what the government is now very much focused on doing.

But as we do so, there are two points that it is important for me to stress."

NS: "Firstly, we must be driven much more by data than by dates.

I know this is difficult given how desperate all of us are to get back to something close to normal, but if we open up too quickly to meet arbitrary dates, we do risk setting our progress back."

NS: "Indeed, because of the new, more infectious variant, our exit from lockdown is likely to be even more cautious than it was last summer.

And secondly, probably for a while yet, 100% normality is unlikely to be possible."

NS: "So in a world where we can't do everything immediately, we will need to decide what matters most.

That's why you will hear me talk increasingly about trade-offs."

NS: "I will offer two immediate examples of that.

As I'll come on to discuss shortly, we are choosing to use the very limited headroom we have right now to get at least some children back to school - because children's education and wellbeing is such a priority."

NS: "But being able to get children back to education may mean the rest of us living with some other restrictions for longer.

That is a trade-off we need to be willing to make."

NS: "And, also, if we want to return as much normality as we can to life within Scotland, the need to live for a longer period with significant restrictions on our ability to travel overseas is likely to be inescapable."

NS: "So 'what matters most?' is a question we will have to ask ourselves often in the weeks ahead.

And it will be important for me and for the government to be very upfront about the choices we face."

NS: "Now, I am talking today in general terms, but I can confirm that the Scottish Government is currently preparing a revised strategic framework, which will set out in more detail when and how we might gradually emerge from lockdown."

NS: "We hope to publish this new framework next week, following discussions with the other parties in parliament, and also with business organisations, trade unions, third sector bodies and others."

NS: "It will aim to set out how we will use and balance all the tools at our disposal - restrictions and advice, vaccination, test and protect, and travel restrictions - to restore, on a phased basis, greater normality to our everyday lives."

NS: "It will set out as far as possible the conditions that need to be met, in terms of the data, for us to start lifting restrictions."

NS: "And it will detail the broad order of priority for re-opening, including what a return to a geographic levels approach might look like in due course."

NS: "Again, I would emphasise that if we want to keep moving in the right direction - and avoid setbacks - caution will be necessary.

That is why the framework will also try to be clear about what we don't think will be possible for a while longer."

NS: "So, to give just one example, we are likely to advise against booking Easter holidays, either overseas or within Scotland, as it is highly unlikely that we will have been able to fully open hotels or self-catering accommodation by then."

NS: "However, for the summer, while it is still highly unlikely that overseas holidays will be possible or advisable, staycations might be - but this will depend on the data nearer the time."

NS: "However, given the risks posed by new variants of this virus, it is hard to overstate the necessity of being careful, cautious and gradual as we exit this lockdown, if we want to avoid another one later in the year."

NS: "And that means, for now, all of us continuing to abide by the stay-at-home requirement.

Indeed, doing that for a further period is essential to permit the headroom necessary for the change I am about to confirm."

NS: "In terms of the order in which we exit lockdown, the Government has always made clear that education should be the top priority."

NS: "I announced two weeks ago our preliminary decision that pre-school children, pupils in primaries 1, 2 and 3, and a limited number of senior phase students who need access to school for essential practical work, would return from Monday 22nd February."

NS: "I also said that, from the same date, we would seek to enable a limited increase in the provision for vulnerable children - specifically those with the most significant additional support needs - where schools believe this is essential."

NS: "I'm pleased to confirm today that, in line with the advice of our expert group, this first phase of the re-opening of schools will go ahead as planned on Monday.

We will need to monitor the impact of this change very carefully before taking any further decisions."

NS: "However, I hope we will be able to set out the second phase of school re-opening in two weeks' time."

NS: "I want to be clear, though, that the need to properly assess the impact of this limited re-opening means we think it unlikely, at this stage, that there will be any further return to school before 15th March."

NS: "As we consider these issues, we are of course doing everything we can to ensure that schools are as safe as possible for children, and for the education workforce."

NS: "As senior phase pupils, teachers and school staff start to return, we will be making at-home lateral flow tests available to them twice a week, as part of a wider package of in-school mitigations."

NS: "Comprehensive testing guidance has now been issued to schools and local authorities, and as of yesterday, more than 2,200 schools had received deliveries of test kits."

NS: "We are also working with YoungScot to provide online information and support for senior phase pupils who want to take part in the testing programme."

NS: "In addition, senior secondary pupils will be required to observe two metre physical distancing while in school, and on school transport, in the period immediately after the return."

NS: "We are also publishing today updated school safety guidance, developed with the Education Recovery Group. This sets out a range of additional safety mitigations."

NS: "And to help implement them, we will be providing local authorities and schools with an additional £40 million, as part of a wider £100 million package to accelerate school recovery. The Finance Secretary will confirm details later this afternoon."

NS: "The final point I want to make about schools, before setting out a more general message about the phased re-opening, is that the National Qualifications 2021 Group will soon publish further details on how qualifications will be awarded this year..."

NS: "..in a way which fairly reflects pupils' experience of remote learning.

We have also decided that all teachers and lecturers involved in awarding national qualifications this year will receive a one-off payment of £400."

NS: "This will be paid to part-time teachers on a pro rata basis. And two days will be set aside for teachers to work on assessments this year.

Further details concerning the payment, and these assessment support days, will be provided in due course."

NS: "The steps that I have just set out just now are clearly of great importance.

But there is a more general and over-riding message that I need to set out and emphasise today."

NS: "The success of this limited re-opening, and the prospect of getting more pupils back later in March, very much depends on all of us continuing to abide by the wider restrictions."

NS: "The evidence suggests that the key risk in re-opening schools isn't transmission within schools - instead, the risk comes from the increased contact the re-opening sparks amongst the wider adult population."

NS: "The risk is that schools going back leads to parents socialising more, at the school gates for example, or returning to the workplace rather than working from home."

NS: "And so - although I know how difficult this is - I am asking parents and employers to make sure this doesn't happen."

NS: "If you are an employer, please understand that employees who were working from home while their children were being home schooled, should still be working from home next week, even if their children are back at school."

NS: "It is of course a legal obligation for all employers to support employees to work from home as far as is possible.

In addition, if you are a parent whose children will soon be going back to primary school, I can only imagine what a relief that will be."

NS: "But please don't use it as an opportunity to meet up with other parents or friends.

The hard, but inescapable fact is this: if the return to school leads to more contacts between adults over the next few weeks, transmission of the virus will quickly rise again."

NS: "That will then jeopardise our ability to sustain even this limited return and it will make it much less likely that we can get more pupils back soon.

It would also set back our progress more generally."

NS: "So, for now - and I really cannot emphasise this point strongly enough - please treat Monday's important milestone as a return to education for children only, and not as a return to greater normality for the rest of us."

NS: "If we all do that, then I am hopeful that this return to school will be consistent with our continued progress in suppressing the virus."

NS: "And if that does prove to be the case, I am optimistic that we will soon be able to set out the next phase in the journey back to school for young people.

And while I can't set out an indicative date for that today, I hope to be in a position to do so in two weeks' time."

NS: "As I said earlier, between now and the next review date in two weeks' time, we will publish the new strategic framework, plotting a gradual route back to greater normality for all of us."

NS: "It will continue to prioritise education, followed by greater family contact and the phased re-opening of the economy, probably with non-essential retail starting to open first."

NS: "And it will be clear on the trade-offs - not least continued travel restrictions - that will be necessary to make more normality within our own borders possible."

NS: "But for now, the most important priority - if any of this is to be attainable in the weeks ahead - is to continue to firmly suppress the virus.

And that means sticking to the current lockdown rules."

NS: "I know that by acknowledging how hard these rules are, I don't make them any easier.

I desperately wish that I could be firmer now about exactly when and how we will exit lockdown in the weeks ahead."

NS: "But I am acutely aware that moving too quickly - or getting this balance wrong - will cause cases to rise again."

NS: "And that would mean more people ill and in hospital, more pressure on our NHS, and the prospect of more, not fewer restrictions as we have to start all over again in getting the virus back under control."

NS: "The fact is that a cautious approach - however frustrating - will be more successful and more sustainable.

So please continue to stick to the letter and the spirit of the rules."

NS: "Stay at home except for essential purposes. Do not meet people from other households indoors.

Follow the FACTS advice when you have to go out and about.

Work from home if you can – and if you are an employer, support your employees to work from home."

NS: "By doing all of this - especially as children start to go back to school - we will continue to protect each other, protect our communities, and the NHS."

NS: "It will allow us - we hope - to keep the virus under control while we vaccinate more and more people and make our way, slowly but surely and steadily, to better and brighter days ahead."

NS: "So please, I would urge everyone to continue to stick with it, and stick together.

Stay at Home. Protect the NHS. Save lives."