Twitter Thread by The SNP



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First Minister @NicolaSturgeon: "I'm going to speak in a few moments about the announcements we made over the weekend, the announcements I set out here on Saturday evening..."

NS: "and I will also reflect on the decisions that have been made and intimated by some other countries, in respect of closing borders with the UK.

But first of all, let me begin with today's statistics.

The total number of positive cases reported yesterday was 1,504."

NS: "That represents 6% of the total number of tests carried out, and the overall number of confirmed cases is now 113,050.

As you'll have noticed, today's figure represents a significantly higher number of cases than we have seen in recent times."

NS: "We think that this may be, in part, down to a processing backlog last week within the UK Lighthouse system.

Please be aware that today's figure may be affected by that backlog of cases now coming through the system and being reported on."

NS: "However we will be doing further analysis of these case numbers to confirm that."

NS: "I can also confirm that 1,078 people are currently in hospital – that is an increase of 17 from yesterday.

59 people are in intensive care, which is 1 more than yesterday."

NS: "And 0 additional deaths have been registered in the last 24 hours, of a patient who first tested positive over the previous 28 days."

NS: "However, registration offices tend to be closed at weekends - and so the figures we report on Sundays and Mondays can be artificially low as a result."

NS: "In total, since Friday's update, 44 deaths have been registered.

That means that the total number of deaths, under the daily measurement, is now 4,283."

NS: "Every single one of those deaths is obviously a source of heartbreak. And yet again, I want to send my condolences to everyone who has been bereaved as a result of this pandemic."

NS: "I am joined today by the Chief Medical Officer, and by the Chief Constable. The Chief Constable will talk about Police Scotland's approach to enforcing Covid regulations as we head into Christmas."

NS: "For my part, I want to stress once again, how much the Scottish Government values the hard work, professionalism and public service of Scotland's police officers and the staff who support them."

NS: "Those qualities are always appreciated, but have been particularly important during the last few months.

The main thing I want to do in my own remarks, is to reflect a bit on developments over the weekend."

NS: "I'm going to spend a bit of time on these, because I do know and understand how upsetting Saturday's announcements, in particular, were for so many of you."

NS: "The first thing I want to do is reiterate the point that none of the actions we announced on Saturday were taken lightly."

NS: "The analysis so far of the new variant of COVID that has been identified in the UK does give us real cause for concern - because the indications are that it is much more transmissible."

NS: "Let me stress through that there is no evidence so far that this new strain causes more severe illness, and I think that is reassuring."

NS: "Further analysis of this new strain is being carried out, so there is much we still have to learn about it, but given what we have been advised so far, it is essential to take the risk seriously and act accordingly."

NS: "The key lesson of the last ten months is that if we are complacent in the face of this virus, or act too slowly, or wait for all possible information before making decisions, it can run away from us very quickly - and the consequences can be serious indeed."

NS: "So that is the context for the strong precautionary and preventative action we announced on Saturday.

I want now to turn to some of the detail and consequences of that."

NS: "Firstly, I want to address the announcements yesterday that several countries – including France – have instituted travel bans to prevent people from the UK entering their countries."

NS: "Our advice for individuals here is already that you should not travel to or from Scotland, unless it is absolutely essential."

NS: "Indeed, travel to and from other parts of the UK without an essential reason is prohibited by law for now."

NS: "This is a decision we certainly do not take lightly - but it is one that is necessary to prevent more of this new strain of the virus coming in to Scotland."

NS: "In terms of international travel, most of the attention overnight, for understandable reasons, has been on the decision by France to put in place a ban on accompanied freight traffic, essentially lorry traffic, entering France."

NS: "France has said this morning that they intend to establish a protocol to enable movement to resume – something that we very much welcome. However we do not yet know exactly when that will take effect."

NS: "We hope the current situation will improve over the course of the day - but of course for as long as it pertains, it has significant implications for many businesses in Scotland."

NS: "It affects the ability of exporters, including our seafood sector, to deliver to overseas markets. And it also affects our ability to import goods and supplies into the UK and into Scotland."

NS: "I will chair a Scottish Government resilience meeting on this later today. Before that, I will be taking part in a COBRA meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister, with the UK Government and devolved governments..."

NS: "..and we are working closely with the UK Government, and will continue to do so, to mitigate any impacts.

I have heard calls from our food sector for the UK Government to take a number of steps to enable them to continue to export, and I support those calls."

NS: "In particular the UK has planned for port disruption as part of a No-deal Brexit, and those plans should now be activated."

NS: "We have also urged the UK Government to extend the current Brexit transition period, or to secure a grace period before any deal is implemented, to prevent further disruption."

NS: "I think everybody would accept that all of us have quite enough on our plate to deal with right now without compounding those difficulties by the end of the Brexit transition period."

NS: "For the moment, however, I want to stress two key points.

First, the stockpiles of medicines that were being built up ahead of Brexit are in place – and so while we monitor medicine supply very carefully, we have no immediate concern."

NS: "We are also assured that there is no risk to supplies of the Covid vaccine.

And secondly, we have been assured by supermarkets that they are well stocked for Christmas. So there is no need for people to buy any more than you normally would."

NS: "I would ask everybody to please support each other, and shop responsibly.

These are difficult times we are living through, but we've been served well by that spirit of solidarity and it's important that it continues over this next period."

NS: "Let me now turn to the decisions I set out here on Saturday.

Some have questioned the need for these actions given that overall prevalence of Covid in Scotland is currently quite a bit lower than in some other parts of the UK."

NS: "But there's two points it's important for me to make about that. Firstly, Scotland's case numbers have been volatile in recent days. - and after some weeks of decline, we think they may be rising again.

Today's numbers have shown that once again."

NS: "Because of that, our R number has risen, and after a couple weeks of it being slightly below 1, we think it is now hovering around 1 again.

So even without the new strain we would have no room for complacency."

NS: "However, it is concern about the new strain that necessitated the very stringent actions I set out on Saturday.

We know this strain already exists in Scotland - though we think it is still at lower levels than in the south of England."

NS: "However, if it is the case - as early analysis suggests - that this strain is up to 70% more transmissible and could add up to .4 to an R number already hovering around 1, the risk of it rapidly spreading here..."

NS: "..as it appears to be doing in other parts of the UK already - is very real.

In London and the south east of England, it is thought that this new strain might already account for 40 - 60% of all new cases."

NS: "That's what we've got to stop here in Scotland, and that's the reason for the actions that I announced on Saturday.

Over the course of this pandemic, perhaps the most important thing we have learned, is that failing to act quickly, is almost always a mistake."

NS: "If we do nothing now, we are likely to see more new infections in Scotland as a result of this variant - placing an even greater strain on our health service, and leading to more deaths."

NS: "But as things stand, with our lower prevalence in a relative sense, we still have a chance of keeping this situation under control while the vaccination programme continues - and while we get case numbers back to very low levels again."

NS: "That is why we announced action on Saturday on two fronts – firstly, to try to stop more cases of the new variant from coming into Scotland, and secondly, to try to stop it spreading within the country."

NS: "In relation to the first of those, as I said earlier - we are maintaining a strict travel ban on non-essential travel between Scotland and the rest of the UK."

NS: "That ban – which will not be relaxed at all over Christmas, even Christmas Day unfortunately - is one of the issues the Chief Constable will talk about in his remarks."

NS: "However since the variant has already established a foothold in Scotland, we also need to reduce the risk of it spreading here.

We have taken three key decisions to do that."

NS: "First, we are now enabling indoor mixing between households only on Christmas Day itself, and only within Scotland – rather than over a 5-day period across the UK."

NS: "Fundamentally, though, my advice is not to meet indoors at all, even on Christmas day, if you can possibly avoid it. If you can, see family from other households outdoors only.

The second key decision that we have taken is to impose tighter restrictions after Christmas."

NS: "We will apply level 4 measures to all of mainland Scotland, for a period of three weeks from Boxing Day onwards. The levels will be reviewed after two weeks."

NS: "What that means is that from Boxing Day morning, non-essential shops will close. So will pubs, cafes and restaurants, apart from for takeaways. We'll be asking everybody to work hard to reduce any unnecessary interactions with other households."

NS: "And non-essential travel to and from different local authority areas will also be prohibited by law from Saturday. The exceptions to level 4 will be Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and the other island communities where we have reduced restrictions in recent weeks."

NS: "These areas will go into level 3 but, again, with no non-essential travel to and from them.

The third key decision on Saturday was to delay the return of schools after the holidays."

NS: "Again, this was a decision we did not take lightly. Everybody knows how hard we've worked to keep our schools open from August."

NS: "This decision means, with the exception of children of key workers and more vulnerable, children, pupils will not return to learning until 11th January, until the 18 of January at least, schools will be online only."

NS: "These were all decisions I wish we didn't have to make, and I know they were horrible decisions for all of you to have to hear."

NS: "I am well aware of the impact that level 4 restrictions in particular will have – on people's wellbeing, and on businesses such as retailers and the hospitality sector."

NS: "When I went home from here on Saturday after doing the update, I spent a fair bit of time reading many of the emails I had received. I think it is important for me to do that."

NS: "These were from people - many completely understanding of the need for these decisions - but who nevertheless wanted me to know the impact on them and their families. And it is heartbreaking for so many of you."

NS: "And I want you to know I do understand that. And if I thought there was an alternative to any of these decisions that we are taking right now, I'd take that alternative in a heartbeat."

NS: "But I know the consequences of not acting now to stop this virus could be catastrophic.

So I am genuinely sorry to have to do these things. But believe me when I say they are necessary."

NS: "We simply cannot take the risk of allowing this new variant to spread as rapidly in Scotland, as it appears to be doing in some other parts of the UK."

NS: "We know this virus, like all viruses, exists solely to spread to as many other people as possible. That's how it survives.

It seems to have just become much much better at doing that through the new variant."

NS: "And if we do not act now, to curb its spread, we run the risk of cases running out of control in the early part of the new year."

NS: "The restrictions we have put in place over the weekend give us a much better chance of preventing that happening, while allowing more of the population – especially those who are most vulnerable to the virus - to become vaccinated."

NS: "While I know it's difficult to hear talk of lights at the end of the tunnel at this moment in time, we shouldn't forget that the vaccination does give us that hope for the future that we haven't had at any point in these past 10 months."

NS: "The final point I want to make before handing over to the Chief Constable is this one. Although it appears that this new variant of the virus transmits more easily, it can still be stopped in its tracks..."

NS: "..and the way to stop it in its tracks are through the same measures we have been emphasising and advising throughout the pandemic so far."

NS: "Physical distancing, two-metres if and when at all possible, washing your hands as often as you can, wearing face masks, opening windows while you're indoors, being outdoors as much as possible - all of these things still work in reducing the transmission of the virus."

NS: "In fact, this new variant makes them more important than ever before. So after ten months of all of us becoming really fed up of all of these measures, it is more important now than ever that we really do try to remember them at all times."

NS: "That's why we're asking you to avoid indoor meetings on Christmas Day as far as possible, difficult though I know that is, because indoor meetings are the best possible environment for this virus to spread."

NS: "It is why all of us should remember, in everything we are doing, the FACTS advice - wear your face coverings, avoid crowded places, clean your hands, clean any surfaces you're touching..."

NS: "..keep a two-metre distance as far as you can from people in other households and don't forget to self-isolate and get tested if you have any symptoms."

NS: "I know how difficult all this is. The last 10 months have been unremittingly hard for everybody, and I suspect this next two weeks are going to be even harder yet."

NS: "The time of year when we should be looking forward to spending time with our loved ones. I do know how tough it is but this is necessary."

NS: "We must do these things to get us through the next stage of the pandemic, while the vaccination programme gathers pace as safely as possible."

NS: "I can never thank you enough for continuing to bear these sacrifices and continuing to do all of the things necessary to keep yourselves and all of your loved ones safe, so thank you for all of that."