



LIVING WITH COVID-19

MOVING TO AN ENDEMIC APPROACH

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Isle of Man
Government
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Isle of Man Government
COVID-19 Endemic Approach

Introduction

A virus is endemic when there are "persistent, low or moderate levels of disease" in a given geographical location, according to the Communicable Disease Control Handbook.

It becomes an epidemic when the "occurrence of infection exceeds the expected level for a given time period".

The word pandemic refers to when "an epidemic spreads over several countries or continents".

In September 2021, the Isle of Man Government published its latest COVID-19 approach document, 'Learning to live in a world with COVID-19', recognising that COVID-19 was likely to be with us in some form for years to come, and the need to find an appropriate, and importantly, sustainable balance in how we deal with it. The approach was based on a number of key areas:

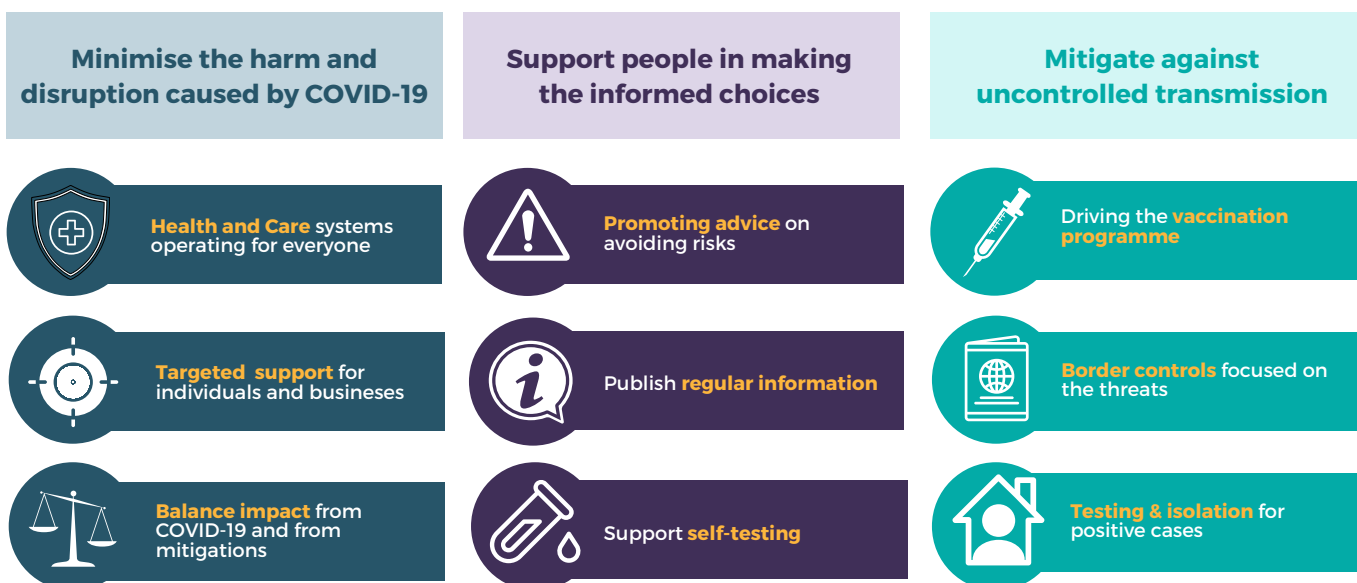
Learning to live in a world with Covid-19 approach



In November 2021, the Isle of Man Government also produced its 'Winter Framework' which built on the foundations laid out within this approach and set out what might happen given the increasing threats that winter presented and the reduced capacity to respond.

Learning to live in a world with COVID-19

Isle of Man Government Strategic Approach



And be prepared to intervene

Based on a wide range of factors, in particular health and care capacity and social and economic impact

This document sets out what the next stage, hopefully the last stage, in learning to live with COVID-19 should be and the steps necessary to finally start to live with COVID-19 and return to going about our normal lives again.

The Isle of Man Government implemented measures from the Level 2 approach within the 'Winter Framework' in November 2021, which included the strengthening of advice on face coverings and increased testing. Since the framework was published the world faced an additional threat in the form of Omicron. In line with its commitment to producing a flexible and targeted strategy, the Isle of Man Government enhanced this framework by developing a new 'Omicron Approach', further strengthening Level 2 and in doing so continuing to aim for Level 3 – Legal Interventions, to only be implemented as a last resort which was set out in the 'Omicron Approach' published in December 2021.

This approach has taken the Island through the Christmas and New Year period, and through the peak in case numbers with nearly 3,000 active cases at one point. We must now consider the next steps that the Island must take in returning to normality. Much has been learnt since December 2021, during the time measures were introduced to manage Omicron, with global speculation that it presented the first real step to COVID-19 moving to become endemic, which has increasingly been supported by the data.

We must now build on this, setting out a clear vision as to how the Island will step away from the rules and regulations that have been necessary to control the virus over the past two years to a place where people are once again able to make their own decisions, informed by clear guidance, particularly for the most vulnerable in society, and then trusted to do the right thing, at the right time and in the right way.

In moving to an endemic approach, the Isle of Man Government acknowledges that there will continue to be challenges, and there will still be times when we are all faced with a degree of uncertainty and renewed threats. The Isle of Man Government acknowledges that we must be prepared to deal with those times effectively, efficiently and proportionately.

The right conditions for change

In considering a move to an endemic state, the right conditions for change must be present. The Isle of Man Government considers there to be five key conditions, set out below, which it will consider in making the final decision to implement this approach.



Our health services are operating normally



Vaccines remain available and effective



No new variants of concern that may lead to serious consequences



The situation on the Island is stable



The situation in the British Isles is stable

Strategic Aims

Whilst previous plans have rightly focused on the need to control the advance of COVID-19 and ensure that our Island is kept safe, the need now is to focus on the future, to ensure that the Island starts to emerge from the shadow that COVID-19 has cast, and move our Island forward with confidence, underpinned by the requirement to ensure the Island stands ready to take appropriate action should it become necessary, as we move to an endemic state.

With this in mind, this approach has two high level aims:

- **Returning Island to normal life; and**
- **Ensuring Government is prepared to intervene if necessary.**

What this means is that we would look to live with COVID-19, accepting that the virus is present in our community for the long term, that it is monitored to ensure we understand how it is affecting the Island but we do not look to identify each and every case and ultimately that COVID-19 is treated in the same way as other communicable diseases (i.e a disease which is transmitted between people) that we currently face.

It also means that the Isle of Man Government will keep to its international obligations to report known case numbers. However the daily reporting dashboard will be discontinued and our decisions and daily lives will no longer be linked to the number of cases there may be on the Island at any one time, but the impact on our health services monitored as part of normal business.

The Isle of Man Government will also need to ensure that appropriate guidance and bespoke advice is provided for those most vulnerable in society, identifying those most at risk of severe outcomes as a result of underlying health conditions, so that no one in society feels excluded or marginalised as a result of this new approach.

Finally, the Isle of Man Government must be in position to act quickly and proportionately if the situation warranted it, such as where another new variant of concern is identified that poses such a significant threat to public health in its severity that our health services once again come under significant and sustained pressure requiring Government to act.

Planning Assumptions

In developing this approach a number of assumptions were made in ensuring that it delivered against its aims:

- **Government will consider COVID-19 as having become endemic on Island whilst still meeting its international obligations**
- **People will be empowered to make their own decisions based on their own circumstances, informed by appropriate guidance - particularly for the most vulnerable in society**
- **The core Public Health Regulations will be suspended**
- **Continuing high levels of population immunity will be maintained**
- **Global connectivity will be maintained**

Each of these assumptions are explained in further detail on the following page.

Government will consider COVID-19 as having become endemic on Island whilst still meeting its international obligations

- This is not a formal declaration of a transition to an endemic state, more an acceptance that COVID-19 will be with us for the foreseeable future and will ebb and flow with time becoming hyper-endemic on occasions.
- There is a continuing need to ensure the Island meets any international reporting requirements.

People will be empowered to make their own decisions based on their own circumstances, informed by appropriate guidance - particularly for the most vulnerable in society.

- This is the withdrawal of Government from people's lives to a position of trusting people to do the right thing.
- Appropriate guidance will be published, particularly for the most vulnerable in society.
- The movement away from legal requirements to guidance as with other communicable diseases will be formalised.

The core Public Health Regulations will be suspended.

- This is the formal move from legislation controlling people's lives to guidance as to what to do and trusting them to do it.
- People clearly understand what to do if they develop the disease as they have overwhelmingly chosen to do the right thing.
- This assumption underpins the strategic aim of returning to normality and moves to treating COVID-19 in the same manner as other communicable diseases.

Continuing high levels of population immunity will be maintained.

- 90% of the Island's adult population have had two doses and 70% of the total adult population have had a booster.
- 93% of the most vulnerable population groups have had two doses and received a booster.
- The booster has been shown to be 90% + effective in preventing serious illness from Omicron – the vaccine was already effective against previous variants.
- Vaccinations and boosting will continue to be provided. It is more important than ever as we look to remove restrictions, for people to continue to take the opportunity to have their booster as it is our first line of defence against the virus.
- 21,000 people are known to have had COVID-19, 7000 since Christmas 2021.

Global connectivity will be maintained.

- The Island will continue to engage with the UK Government to remain part of the NHS COVID Pass for international travel and any UK domestic purposes so Isle of Man residents are not disadvantaged.
- Government will continue to provide a service for PCR testing for international travel with an appropriate charging regime.
- Reduced friction when travelling to and from the Island is a priority.

Measures & Restrictions

The practical implications of this approach in respect of what we do at our borders, in our community and with people who contract the virus are set out as follows:



The borders



Restrictions

Assuming the UK retains a red list requirement, the only restrictions that would still apply are the prohibition of arrivals from UK 'red list' countries unless the traveller has undertaken the relevant quarantine period prior to arriving on the Island.



Pre-arrival

For an appropriate period, a travel declaration will still be required to be completed by all those travelling to the Island, which will be retained for a short period of time in case they need to be contacted.



Arrival

There will be no public health checks on arrival on the Island. Checks of travel declarations will be completed on an ad-hoc basis for compliance purposes.



Post-arrival

There will be no isolation or testing requirements following arrival on the Island for either vaccinated or unvaccinated people.



Community measures



Be Smart

Vaccination and boosters will remain available and people will continue to be encouraged to take up their offer. It is more important than ever as we look to remove restrictions, for people to continue to take the opportunity to have their booster as it is our first line of defence against the virus.



Be Safe

The basic hygiene measures that have been important since the start of the pandemic remain relevant - hands, face, space and fresh air will continue to be important messages for the public who are encouraged to keep doing the right thing and follow the advice.



Be Kind

People will be encouraged to continue to self-test when they have symptoms of COVID-19, in order to make informed personal decisions and to help protect the most vulnerable, and lateral flow devices will remain available to the public.



Be Aware

People will be asked to respect and support the personal choices of others who may decide to continue wearing face coverings, in particular in certain environments or occasions, or where required do so in particular settings.



Positive cases



Stay Away

People will be encouraged to continue to record their cases for surveillance purposes, and advised to stay away from work, school or sensitive locations such as clinical settings until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.



Stay Safe

People will be advised to stay home, keep warm and rest as part of their recovery as with other viral infections.



Be Kind

People will be advised to keep their distance from other people whilst they are symptomatic.



Seek Help

People will be advised to seek medical help or advice when they require it or are in need of advice.



Be Aware

If people do choose to leave their home whilst they have COVID-19 they will be strongly advised to wear face coverings when they do so.



Treatments

Antiviral and other appropriate treatments for COVID-19 will remain available, particularly for those most at risk from COVID-19.



Contact Tracing



Identification

People with COVID-19 will no longer be required to identify their close contacts to Public Health.



Notification

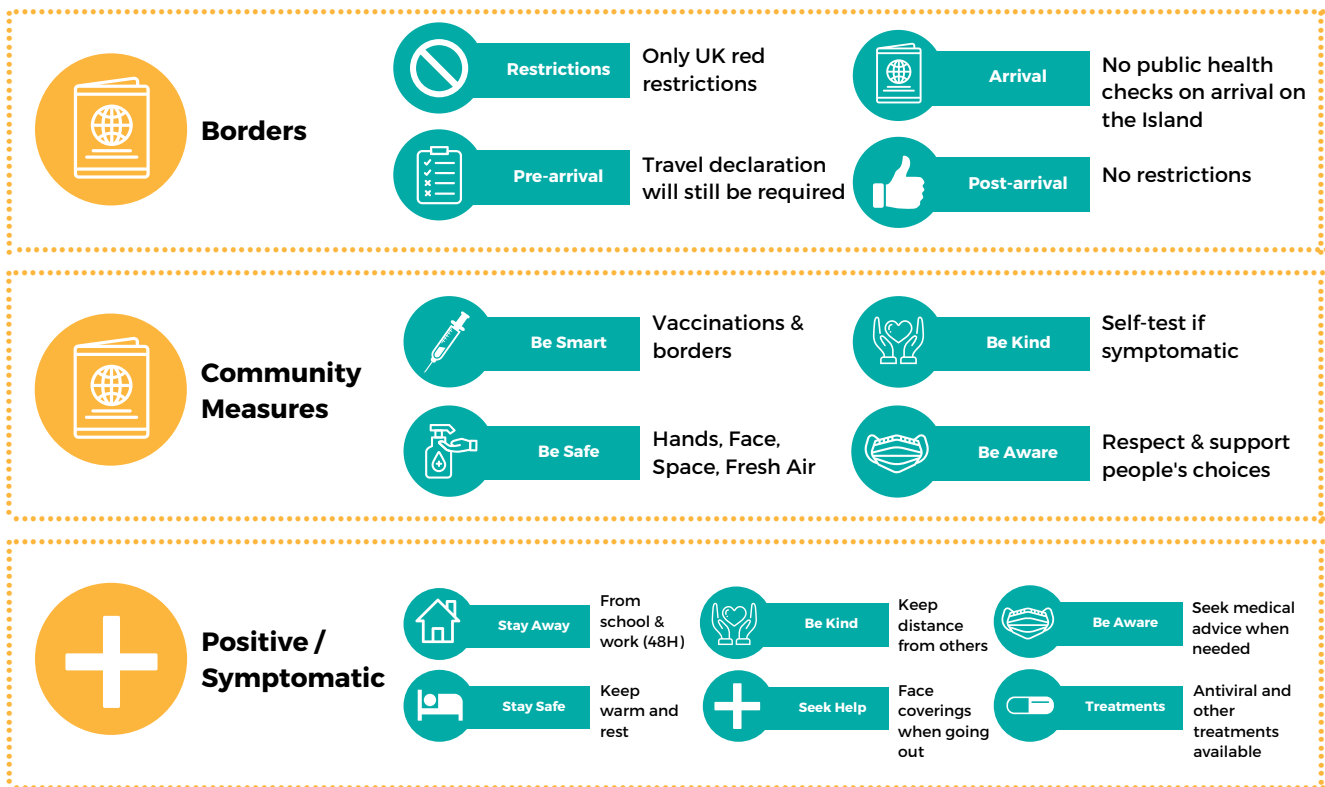
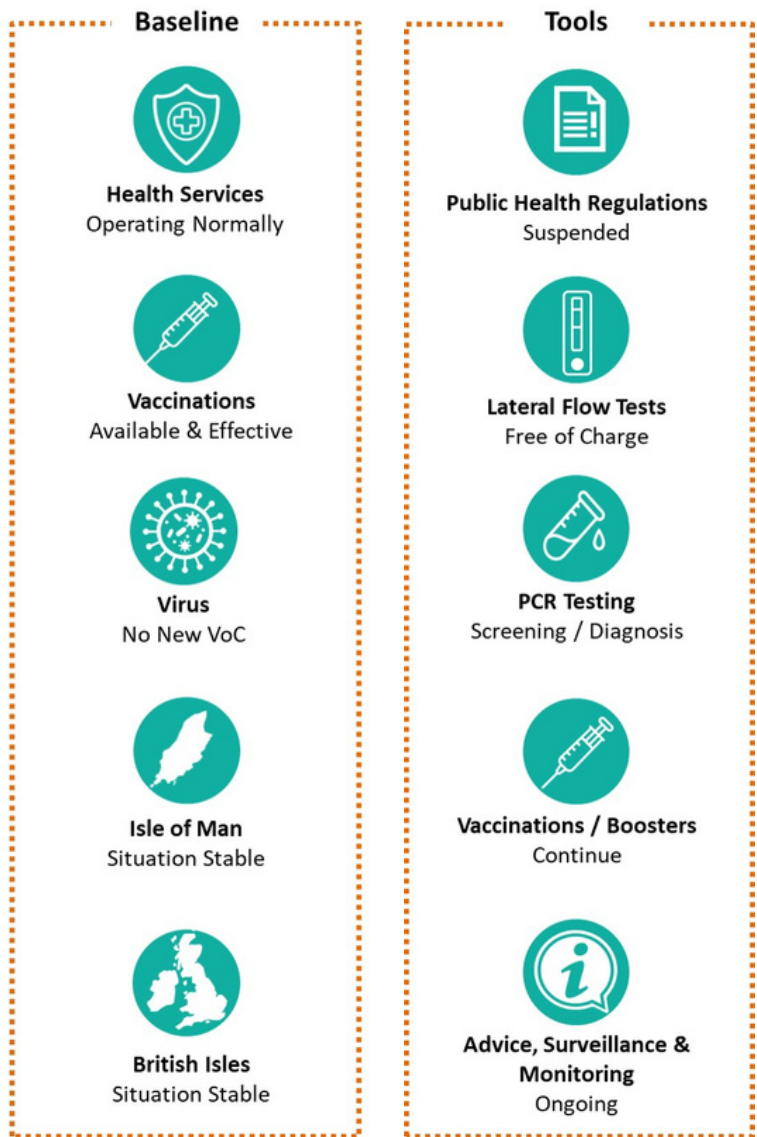
People with COVID-19 will be advised to notify their own close contacts and encouraged to advise their employer, particularly if they work in a sensitive location such as a Care Home.

Endemic Strategic Approach

'Returning the Island to normal life'

'Ensuring Government is prepared to intervene if necessary'

- 1. Government** will consider Covid-19 as having **become endemic** on Island, whilst still meeting any international obligations
- 2. People** will be empowered to make their own decisions based on their own circumstances informed by appropriate guidance - particularly for the most vulnerable in society
- The **core** Public Health Regulations will be **suspended**
- High levels of **population vaccination** will be maintained
- Global connectivity** will be maintained



Conclusion

The Moving to the Endemic approach aims to set out a clear vision as to how the Island will step away from the rules and regulations that have been necessary to control the virus over the past two years. It sets out how the Island can return to a place where people are once again able to make their own decisions, informed by clear guidance, particularly for the most vulnerable in society, and then be trusted to do the right thing, at the right time and in the right way.

Over the last two years we have had to enforce society-wide Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs), such as social distancing and mask wearing. But with the advancement of vaccines, medicines and antivirals, we are now in a much stronger position to move to this next phase of providing Pharmaceutical Interventions for those who need it, rather than national NPIs for all.

To date, 90% of the Island's adult population have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and 65% received a booster, with 93% of the most vulnerable population groups having had two doses and a booster. It is more important than ever as we look to remove restrictions, for people to continue to take the opportunity to have their booster as it is our first line of defence against the virus.

Since Christmas, over 7,000 people have done the right thing by testing, self-recording positive results and then isolating until they were able to self-record a further two negative tests and/or the minimum isolation period ended. Although Government mandated this approach, the improved position we find ourselves in today has very much only been possible due to the vast majority of people wanting to do the right thing.

The Isle of Man Government recognises that a move away from set procedures and rules will understandably make some people anxious, and some vulnerable people more worried. However, we must now find an appropriate, and importantly, sustainable balance in how we deal with the virus that is likely to be with us in some form for years to come. As such, Government will ensure that appropriate guidance and bespoke advice is provided for those most vulnerable in society, identifying those most at risk of severe outcomes as a result of underlying health conditions, so that no one in society feels excluded or marginalised as a result of this new approach.

Allowing everyone to take personal responsibility has always been an important part of our journey and this next, and hopefully final, approach is a natural extension of this. Underlying this approach are our core messages of: **Be Smart, Be Safe, Be Kind and Be Aware.**

In moving to an endemic approach, the Isle of Man Government acknowledges that there will continue to be challenges, and there will still be times when we are all faced with a degree of uncertainty and renewed threats. As with all aspects of our response, this approach and document will be kept under continuous review, acknowledging that we must be prepared to deal with those times effectively, efficiently and proportionately. It is hoped that throughout February the Island may reach an endemic state allowing us to adopt this new approach from **31 March 2022**, by which time the Island's eligible population will have been offered their vaccination and/or booster.

A virus is endemic when there are "persistent, low or moderate levels of disease" in a given geographical location, according to the Communicable Disease Control Handbook.

It is important to note that at any point we may need to take a step back should new information, such as a new variant of concern, come to light, particularly as the effect of vaccine waning continues to be understood. However, crucially we must at some point take a step forward of which this document outlines the broad approach we, the Council of Ministers, believe is required.

