



LIVING WITH COVID-19

WINTER 2021 FRAMEWORK



Isle of Man Government
Winter Framework 2021/2022

Updated: November 2021

Introduction

In September 2021, Government published its latest COVID-19 approach document, 'Learning to live in a world with COVID-19', recognising that COVID-19 is likely to be with us in some form for years to come, and the need to find an appropriate, and importantly a sustainable balance in how we deal with it.

This approach remains valid throughout the Winter and is summarised below.



More details on this approach can be found at - <https://covid19.gov.im/general-information/government-strategy-for-covid-19/>.

The overall direction of travel remains to continue to scale back mitigation measures whenever safe to do so, until we reach an ultimate point where a pandemic response is no longer needed at all.

It is clear that winter presents additional pressures on our Island, our NHS and our Covid response with increased risks, and decreased capacity within the health and care service and it is the aim of this administration to avoid the need for legal interventions unless absolutely necessary.

Therefore, in order to maintain vital services and to avoid direct intervention wherever possible, additional mitigations measures are likely to increasingly be needed by all of us to protect our NHS and in doing so protect our Island.

This framework sets out the broad approach across 3 levels of response, and what is required at each level.

- **Level 1 – Our base response** – the things we all **need** to do
- **Level 2 – Additional responses** – the things we **may** need to do
- **Level 3 – Legal interventions** – the things we must be prepared to do, but **aim to avoid** through increased responses at level 1 and 2

Our hope is that Island life can continue as normal as far as possible throughout the next five months through to the end of March 2022 and we need our economy, our society and our health and care services to operate as best they can. We also need to recognise the pressures winter brings from increased indoor mixing, additional respiratory illnesses and the potential for reduced effectiveness from the vaccines over time.

We need to contain cases within a manageable level, protect our NHS and protect those most vulnerable.

Winter Framework – Level 1

Our collective responsibility is therefore to do as much as we can, individually and together, to protect ourselves, our families, our community and our NHS.

At Level 1 – we all need to be aware of the risks of Covid and minimise these risks for ourselves and each other, maintaining cases within manageable levels and protecting those most vulnerable to serious illness. The nine strands of the September approach remain in place and underpin our overall approach into the winter and we must all take responsibility for helping to manage the risks posed.

For **everyone** this means:

Be Smart – Be Vaccinated – Vaccinations provide maximum protection from serious illness and Hospitalisation. We need to continue to promote and deliver vaccinations, boosters and third doses. Flu vaccinations are also important for those eligible.

Be Safe – Hands, Face, Space, Fresh Air – this has been the mantra over the last 18 months but going into the winter we all need to increase our focus on these mitigations. If a particular setting proves difficult to allow distancing or ventilation, then other mitigations such as face coverings become more important. These all work best together rather than individually as explained in the “Swiss cheese” approach to risk mitigation .

No single intervention can fully prevent the spread of the virus, but multiple layers of intervention improve our collective success.

Depending on the level of risk at any time, the number of required layers of defence in place will fluctuate and increasing other layers as a result helps improve overall protection.



Be Kind – Be Tested – Free lateral flow tests will continue to be provided and over 90% of all cases over the last 3 months have been initially confirmed through one of these tests. Not everyone displays symptoms however and transmission often occurs through those unaware that they have the virus. Regular testing, twice a week and daily for close contacts, will greatly help avoid transmission. Testing before visiting vulnerable people or attending large events is also encouraged. Anyone with symptoms should immediately book a PCR test and isolate awaiting results.

Be Aware – Face Coverings – Over the winter months in particular these will play an important part in helping protect against transmission. Whilst we need to continue going about our daily lives as much as possible, they are strongly advised when mixing with people you don't normally mix with and in indoor settings where other mitigations are difficult.

Be Aware – Fresh Air and Ventilation – Indoor mixing increases over the winter months and fresh air reduces as more windows and doors become closed. It is vitally important to consider ventilation when indoors and consider other mitigations to offset this – such as distancing and face coverings.

Be Aware – Targeted Interventions – To help continue with normal Island life as far as possible it will increasingly be that targeted interventions may be needed in specific locations, venues, workplaces or schools. Advice and directions will be provided directly by Public Health and may include some aspects of Level 2 in a particular setting – such as working from home.

For **businesses**, this means:

- **Supporting staff** – encourage staff to self-test regularly and to stay at home if they are unwell
- **Supporting customers** – respect and encourage customers to take mitigations and encourage good hygiene practices
- **Supporting a healthy environment** – provide sanitisation stations, CO2 monitors and good ventilation and be aware of the situation within your workplace. Respond to any advice provided

Winter Framework Level 2 – Increased National Mitigations

If winter pressures increases the risk to our health and care provision, you should expect to see a strengthening of what we ask of you to help support a more robust response.

For **individuals** this may mean:

- **Face coverings** will increasingly be expected to be worn in settings where it is difficult to distance and where you mix closely with others or the ventilation is poor
- **Increased testing** will be asked - for example in workplaces and to increase the frequency of self-testing. We may also have to revisit our broader testing strategies
- **Household Mixing** carries risk of transmission and we may ask that unnecessary household mixing is reduced, to help avoid further transmission, especially through asymptomatic cases
- **Increased vigilance** will be asked from everyone – to ultimately do everything possible to reduce the level of cases and transmission and in doing so help avoid the need for further legal interventions that might come in level 3.

For **businesses** this may mean:

- **Working from home** may be requested wherever possible to help to reduce transmission in the workplace
- **Increased testing** – supporting employees and customers to maximising testing opportunities before attending
- **Increased vigilance** to ensuring that workplaces open to staff and customers have done everything possible to maximise hygiene standards and minimise risks

Although level 2 is described as a specific level, as any situation develops there may be a need for a more flexible and targeted response which includes elements of each level. The aim remains to avoid the need for widespread legal interventions unless absolutely necessary.

Winter Framework Level 3 – Legal Interventions

A level 3 response must be available, though it is hoped that implementation will not be required. This involves employing a full outbreak plan which may include the full range of interventions as previously seen over the last 20 months.

These may include :

- **mandating face coverings**
- **working from home** as a legal requirement
- **social distancing** measures being reintroduced and limits on gatherings
- applying **restrictions to certain activities** and **businesses**

While hoping to avoid the need to introduce further legal interventions, realistically, we must be prepared that if the pressures on our health and care provision or other critical services look set to be overwhelmed, or Island life appears severely threatened, we may be required to intervene.

There are **three considerations** that may drive a decision to move to level 3:

- the health and care services are in danger of being overwhelmed,
- a new variant of concern threatens the vaccine efficacy, or;
- there is a significant level of disruption to our Island's economic and social infrastructure

It is the aim of the new political administration to avoid the need for a legal response as far as possible due to the undeniable social, economic and health impact that lockdowns and restrictions can have on our Island.

By everyone taking responsible steps under level 1 and level 2 we can protect ourselves, each other, our NHS and avoid the need for widespread legal interventions.

Planning assumptions behind the Winter Framework

In establishing this framework and using it, there are six main principles that will be kept in mind:

1. The **pressure on the health and care system** will remain the principal driver behind any decision to escalate our status and response.
2. We should try to **maintain other aspects of Island life, society** and the **economy** as normal as possible – our **children's education** must be maintained as a priority.
3. We should continue to **promote and deliver the Vaccination Programme** as a priority.
4. **Clear and relevant communications** remain crucial in helping everyone understand the risks and how to mitigate against them.
5. We should be **prepared to provide early intervention** where we see specific issues and risks.
6. We should try to **avoid the use of legal restrictions** and Island wide interventions other than when the indications are that the health and care services are in danger of being overwhelmed, a new variant of concern threatens the vaccine efficacy or there is a significant level of disruption to our Island's economic and social infrastructure.

Decision Making

The current situation continues to be monitored on a daily basis, and there are a number of mechanisms for considering and advising on the pandemic response.

Council of Ministers have established a **new National Covid Response Group** for improved decision making which includes representation from the chair of the Emergency Advisory Group ('EAG').

This group will **monitor the position regularly with information** including on borders, education, data on cases numbers/ trajectory and the status of our health and care system, economic indicators and community measures. They will also need to monitor UK and International Developments and these will be captured regularly and assessed by the National Covid Response Group, with recommendations that arise fed directly into Council of Ministers.

Whilst this document focuses on the approach to managing Covid, it is very much the case that other challenges such as Flu and other respiratory illnesses are important factors in their own right in terms of pressures on the NHS and the mitigations posed in Level 1 and Level 2 will additionally help everyone in terms of protecting themselves and in doing so each other and the NHS from these broader viruses as well.

An important part of decision making in the approach to avoiding widespread legal interventions where possible sits with **individual and collective responsibility** for personal decision making for all Island residents.

Making sensible, informed decisions will help keep you and others safe.

Media outreach and public communications will continue to play a key role in communicating the current situation and most up to date data to inform decision making, including continued provision of the dashboard, and the weekly Public Health Surveillance Report.

Conclusion

The past 20 months have been incredibly challenging for all aspects of Island life, but summer 2021 saw life return to a closer level of normality, in large part due to the widespread rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

It is hoped that with our collective defences improved due to the vaccination programme, we will have much lower need to defend ourselves using national interventions going forward and there continues to be positive developments in the international fight against Covid-19 such as antiviral treatments.

The winter months do however present an increased set of risks. Risks from more indoor mixing and other respiratory diseases such as a new flu season, and risks from reductions in vaccine effectiveness and a reduced capability within our NHS to respond. **Simply put the risks are increased and our protection is reduced.**

Our aim is to get through to March 2022 without the need for widespread legal interventions and instead encourage everyone to help take individual and collective responsibility to protect each other, our NHS and our Island's way of life.

We want to Island life to continue, our children's education to continue, our businesses to continue to thrive and for everyone to be able to carry on as free from worry and anxiety as possible, but we must contain transmission to within manageable levels and we must recognise there remain some of our society more vulnerable from serious harm than others.

As our experience with COVID-19 continues to adapt and change, it is difficult to construct specific indicators or thresholds that will dictate moving from one level to another – we will instead need to remain responsive and prepared, and at times may need to be blended or targeted in response.

At this point, over the winter months the most impactful and meaningful response we can all take to manage COVID-19 is in taking collective steps to consider our behaviour.

No Government wishes to ask its residents to change the way that they live, to reconsider how they go about their everyday lives, but our personal decisions and measures we take will help to see us all through the challenges this winter will bring.

We are setting out how we plan to manage these months building on the "Learning to live in a world with covid-19" approach set out in September, ultimately to get through to the end of March 2022 by when we hope the pressures will reduce and also we hope to open our borders fully once again.

Level 1 – we **must all consider personal responsibility** for helping to keep cases down within manageable levels, and **we will** see targeted interventions throughout Winter.

Level 2 – we **may need to ask** for even more increased national mitigations

Level 3 – we **aim to avoid** need for legal interventions

We are a resilient Island, and it has never been more true that we are stronger together.

This winter, we urge you to take the steps outlined in this framework to protect yourself, others around you, and protect our vital Health and Care system.

As such:

- **Be Smart – vaccinations** help protect yourselves and each other – this is vitally important
- **Be Safe – Hands, Face, Space, Fresh Air** – these mitigations all need to continue and work best when taken collectively
- **Be Kind** – testing is an important part of our defence – please continue to use free self-tests
- **Be Aware** – increased use of ventilation, of face coverings and of targeted interventions will all play an important part of our base response.

Council of Ministers

Winter Framework

Learning to live in a world with Covid Approach



LEVEL 1 – Base Level & Targeted Interventions requested as minimum

 <p>Be Smart - Vaccinations Everyone encouraged to be fully vaccinated and boosted to give maximum protection, including Flu jabs</p>	 <p>Be Safe - Hands, Face, Space Strong hygiene practices are especially important when in indoor public spaces – they all need to be considered</p>	 <p>Be Kind – Self-Testing Undergo regular self-testing twice a week, daily if a close contact. Consider before visiting vulnerable people / events. Book a PCR and isolate straight away if any symptoms develop.</p>
 <p>Be Aware – Face Coverings When mixing with people you don't normally mix with they are strongly advised, especially where other mitigations such as distancing or ventilation are more difficult</p>	 <p>Be Aware – Ventilation It is especially important to consider ventilation and fresh air in indoor settings. Business encouraged to maximise ventilation</p>	 <p>Be Aware - Targeted Local Interventions Advisory interventions based on specific outbreaks, recommended by Public Health</p>

LEVEL 2 – Increased National Mitigations - may be requested

 <p>Face Coverings Expected Face coverings elevated to “expected” where it is difficult to avoid mixing – eg Transport, Retail, Secondary Schools. Enhanced vigilance everywhere.</p>	 <p>Work from Home Requested Requested where possible - asking all businesses who can to temporarily operate work from home</p>
 <p>Reduced mixing requested People asked to avoid unnecessary mixing temporarily where possible. Personal space promoted as a key message.</p>	 <p>Increased Testing Requested Asking the public to undertake increased self-testing. Testing strategy reviewed and potential for strengthened “Test to release” for close contacts</p>

LEVEL 3 – Legal Interventions – avoided where possible

 <p>Restrictions on mixing Escalated requirements for social distancing and reduced gatherings.</p>	 <p>Outbreak plan enacted Full outbreak plan considered – including further restrictions on high risk activities. Stepped approach to full lockdown as a last resort.</p>
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Framework Principles

-  *Monitor health and care pressure*
-  *Maintain Island life & education*
-  *Promote and deliver vaccinations*
-  *Clear and relevant communications*
-  *Prepare for early interventions*
-  *Avoid legal interventions*

Monitor Indicators

-  *Health & Care System*
-  *Age / Case Profile*
-  *Vaccination Status & Progress*
-  *Education System*
-  *Economic Indicators*
-  *Social Indicators*
-  *Border Indicators*
-  *UK / International Developments*

