

Statement by An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin on the re-introduction of Level 5 restrictions of the Plan for Living with COVID-19

From [Department of the Taoiseach](#)

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Just eight days ago, I stood here and explained why we needed to introduce a range of strict new controls in the effort to curb this latest wave of COVID infections.

I explained that while we didn't, at that stage, have evidence that the new, more virulent strain of COVID was in our country, the safest and most responsible thing to do was to proceed on the assumption that it was already here.

Unfortunately, that fear proved to be correct.

On Christmas Eve, we received the news we had feared – confirmation that the new strain is indeed in our country.

While international research into this new variant is ongoing, it is already very clear that we are dealing with a strain of the disease that spreads much, much more quickly.

Indeed, it is spreading at a rate that has surpassed the most pessimistic models available to us.

With the disease spreading much faster, the threat of our health system being overwhelmed and the risk of increased sickness and death among our vulnerable and older populations is obvious.

And it has become urgent.

In the week before Christmas, we were seeing about 5% of tests coming back as COVID-positive.

Yesterday, 18% of those tested were infected with the disease.

Over the last seven days, more than 8,000 cases have been confirmed. That is a 61% increase on the previous week.

This latest surge is different to the second wave. We are seeing rising incidence of the disease across all age groups, especially those aged 19-24 and a very worrying increase among those aged 65 and older.

During the second wave, there was a long delay between an increase in cases and an increase in hospital admissions.

This time is very different.

We are already seeing a sharp rise in the number of hospital admissions. This morning, there were 454 COVID patients in hospital. It has almost doubled in a week.

The Reproduction number is currently estimated at between 1.6 and 1.8.

The situation is extremely serious.

The numbers will deteriorate further over the coming days.

As we have navigated the different phases of this crisis together, I have always been clear that we will do what we need to do to suppress the virus when it is growing;

and it is now growing exponentially.

The truth is, that with the presence of the new strain and the pace of growth, this is not a time for nuance in our response.

We must apply the brakes to movement and physical interaction across the country.

We must return to full scale, Level 5 restrictions for a period of at least one month.

In practice, that will mean the following further restrictions:

- from this evening, no visitors are permitted in private homes or gardens, unless they are providing care to children, the elderly or vulnerable, or are part of a support bubble
- no social or family gatherings should take place in any setting. There will be an exemption for weddings, where up to 6 guests will be allowed, and funerals, where up to 10 mourners will be allowed
- you should stay at home, except for travel for work, education or other essential purposes, or to take exercise within 5km of home
- all non-essential retail and gyms will close tomorrow at close of business
- all public health analysis is showing that schools are safe, and schools will reopen, but slightly delayed to 11th January
- by extending the break by 3 days the new restrictions I am announcing this evening will be in place for more than 10 days when schools open. Families will have had an

opportunity to ensure that their contacts are minimised before children return to school.

The last time that we faced such restrictive measures was when this disease first exploded in our midst in early 2020.

I am deeply conscious that we are in a very different space now.

We are all weary, from the bottom of our hearts, of this disease and the impact it has had on our lives.

The next month, as we face into these strictest controls in the depth of winter, is going to be very tough for everyone.

But there is another key difference between then and now.

After a year of the most extraordinary effort by the most talented scientific minds on earth, we have safe and effective vaccines.

We have the most technologically advanced factories in history working around the clock producing this life saving intervention, and we have a global supply chain distributing it around the world.

For the first time since this awful disease landed on our shores, we truly have an end in sight.

Thousands of vaccines are arriving here weekly, and by the end of January, I am confident that many tens of thousands of our most vulnerable citizens and our healthcare workers will have been vaccinated.

The vaccines are now being administered efficiently and safely, but this will take time. The virus can still do immense damage until we have progressed much, much further with the vaccination programme.

We are a society that looks out for the people around us.

And what we are doing now with these new restrictions is working to keep as many of our parents, grandparents, neighbours and friends safe until such time as they have been vaccinated.

This disease and the response it requires is causing massive disruption to our society and it is undermining our economy.

It is having an effect on the mental health of young and old that we will not understand for some time to come.

It is costing billions of Euro.

But the most important responsibility that we all share is to protect the lives of those we love.

The actions that we are taking – as a society and as individuals – is saving lives.

We will rebuild the economy, we will repair the damage to our society.

We will come to terms with this crisis and make sense of the trauma we have all been through in due course.

We will do all these things, and we will start them this coming year, because the vaccine now exists.

But right now, this is what we must do.

We must stay at home and eliminate contact with others now, to make sure that as many of our people as possible are still with us to enjoy the better, brighter days that are up ahead.

Beidh spiorad na meithle, aire, cúram agus foighne ag teastáil san míonna amach romhainn go dtí go dtiocfaidh éifeacht na vaisciní i bhfeidhm. Idir an dalinn, caithfimid a bheith ciallmhar agus cúramach agusna srianta Leibhéal a Cúig seo a leanúint. Táim cinntego dtiocfaimid slán. Caithfimid a bheith dóchasach.

Mar a deir an seanfhocal, is é an dóchas lia gach anró.

Beannachtaí na hAthbhliana oraibh uilig.

Go raibh maith agaibh.