

COVID-19 Recovery Committee

6th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Thursday, 24 February 2021

Scotland's Strategic Framework Update

This note highlights some of the main points in the [updated strategic framework](#) for Scotland, published 22 February 2022.

A new strategic statement

As the pandemic has progressed the [strategic framework has been updated](#). Underpinning each of these has been a strategic statement, which has also evolved.

In the October 2020 [Strategic Framework](#) the overall strategic aim was

...to suppress the virus to the lowest possible level and keep it there, while we strive to return to a more normal life for as many people as possible

In the June 2021 [Strategic Framework Update](#) the strategic aim became

...to suppress the virus to a level consistent with alleviating its harms while we recover and rebuild for a better future

The latest framework describes the strategy as being

To manage COVID-19 effectively, primarily through adaptations and health measures that strengthen our resilience and recovery, as we rebuild for a better future

The government explains the rationale for this as follows:

“Practically, this means that we expect to be less focused on suppressing case numbers than in the past, and more on reducing and mitigating harm. This recognises that - after two years of the pandemic and in light of vaccines

and treatments - the impact of the other harms that arise from a strategy overly focused on suppression is too great.”

Delivering the approach

The updated framework identifies eight areas where action has been taken, and what the next steps are. A selection of the “next steps” under each of these areas are briefly summarised below:

Vaccination:

Some of the next steps include:

- A delivery plan to offer vaccination to all 5 to 11 year olds, following recent advice from the JCVI and (shortly) offering an additional booster to all adults over 75 years old, care home residents and everyone over 12 who is immunosuppressed
- preparing for ongoing booster vaccination activity, particularly for those at highest risk
- increasing efforts to ensure the vaccination programme reaches everyone and is fully inclusive
- planning for a number of different scenarios including an annual booster programme

Testing and surveillance

In the “spring and into the summer” next steps include moving away from the current routine asymptomatic programmes of testing towards:

- testing for those who require clinical care or would benefit from new and emerging treatments;
- a focus on protecting those at highest clinical risk;
- maintaining sufficiently robust surveillance (including genomic sequencing)
- support for local responses in communities where there is enduring transmission;
- supporting outbreak management and mitigation in particularly high-risk settings

Next steps also include

- evolving the advice on frequency of testing (for the population, and for health and education settings)

- publication of a detailed transition plan in March setting out updated plans for Test and Protect for the endemic phase, and how to transition there
- Ensuring an appropriate surveillance system is in place
- Maintaining support for people self-isolating will continue including the Self-Isolation Support Grant (while self-isolation advice remains a population-wide intervention), and considering support required as guidance evolves.
- Publishing a data and reporting strategy in spring 2022

Treatment

Some of the next steps include:

- a UK-wide study called PANORAMIC, run by the University of Oxford, which will lead to the collection of additional data to enable the NHS to fully understand how best to make use of these antiviral treatments in the future
- on Long Covid, continuing to support the implementation of the UK-wide clinical guideline on the long-term effects of COVID-19, whilst NHS National Services Division is establishing a Strategic Network

Deploying Protective measures when necessary

The framework identifies **three broad threat levels**, informed by evidence of disease impact and risk of infection. The type of responses likely for each threat level is also set out.

The framework says that the current threat level is “medium” reflecting “a variant in Omicron that is highly transmissible (with the infection level still high) but of lower severity”. However, assuming infections fall/stabilise “it is likely that our 'threat' level will move down to "low" as we head into the spring and summer”, and the intention includes the following milestones:

- 28 February - COVID certification scheme will cease to be a legal requirement (app will remain available).
- 21 March (indicative date, to be confirmed at preceding review) – the legal requirement to wear face coverings in public indoor places and on public transport will convert to guidance. Other remaining legal requirements will convert to guidance and good practice as appropriate
- Spring 2022 Test & Protect transition plan. Changes to testing and isolation requirements expected

Supporting positive behaviours and adaptation

A wide range of measures are included under this heading. A selection of the next steps include:

- exploring the establishment of a People's Panel... to look at “the reality of personal responsibility and safer behaviours for people in a wide range of different circumstances”.
- Working with all sectors to support adaptation for businesses, organisations and the public generally to be more resilient to future shocks.
- developing business campaigns, guidance, update the compliance toolkit, and support voluntary action to help customers feel safe.
- longer-term pieces of work on: regulatory reform; business continuity and resilience planning; simplification and improved accessibility of guidance; public health training for employers and employees; and physical modification of premises to reduce the risk of infectious disease transmission.
- A variety of measures on ventilation, including ensuring that necessary improvements in ventilation will be proposed in light of the work of the Short Life Working Group on Ventilation (recommendations due by the end of March 2022)
- On hybrid working - working with employer and business organisations and trades unions.
- working with local government and other public sector partners to lead by example in adapting public services and spaces to be as safe as possible
- campaigns and communications including on mental health, supporting parents of teens, and money support

Helping to Manage COVID-19 Internationally

Some of the next steps include:

- Considering (in late February/early March) alternatives to Managed Quarantine Service hotels for any travellers arriving from a country that is on the red list in future
- a focus on what the response should be to the identification of a future variant of the virus, including the definition of 'fully vaccinated' in an international context
- A range of activities relating to international vaccinations, such as offering to share Scotland's experience in delivering a mass vaccination programme with the Governments of Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda.

Supporting People at Highest Risk and Reducing Health Inequalities

This section included a very wide range of actions, including:

- A number of measures to ensure that people who have been on the Highest Risk List are supported, empowered, and included throughout this calmer period into a more normal way of living
- A variety of measures relating to adult care homes to provide “a proportionate response that reduces harms to wellbeing and health, will help to ensure that care home residents are supported to live their lives as free from restriction as possible”
- A range of measures on infection, prevention and control including for example that continue to work on a four nations basis to inform and develop IPC guidance for Scotland
- Actions on PPE, for example, developing, throughout 2022-23, a new approach to how the public sector procures and supplies PPE in Scotland, with this coming into operation in 2023.
- A number of measures under the headings of developing an intelligence-led approach to tackling racialised health inequalities, and a place-based approach to tackling inequalities at local level

Mitigating Broader Harms and Supporting Recovery

This area also contained a very broad range of actions

- For Business – the government pointed out that “there is currently no budget cover in financial year 2022-23 for further business support, so providing similar support if future restrictions were introduced would require additional funding from the UK Government to be made available”.
- A number of NHS resilience measures were highlighted based on “the learning from the response to the recent wave of COVID-19, and nurture and support the creativity and innovation of our staff, to deliver improved resilience and long-term sustainability across our health services”
- On primary healthcare, a number of measures were intended to focus “on sustaining high quality services, supporting more integrated working with other health and social services, offering more care closer to people’s homes and reducing health inequalities”
- On mental health in addition to the work in the Transition and Recovery Plan, the government indicated there would be “an enhanced and specific focus on mental health as we move forward” and that it is imperative that “good mental health is seen a core part of recovery”.

- On social care a number of actions were intended to “ease the pressure across the social care system, including additional support for unpaid carers and those for whom they care”.
- There are a number of Community resilience actions, and measures include further developing National Volunteer Coordination Hub (NVC Hub) to provide additional volunteers for the COVID-19 vaccination and community testing programmes.
- Finally actions were identified on Supporting Families, Babies, Children and Young People, Early Learning and Childcare, schools colleges and universities, as well as for *wider public services such as housing, transport and justice*.

Future pandemics

It is perhaps also worth flagging up that the government has commissioned the Standing Committee on Pandemics to provide a report on improved preparedness for future pandemics, with interim recommendations by July 2022

Additionally, the Scottish Government, with Public Health Scotland (PHS), Local Government and other partners, are developing a COVID-19 Outbreak Management Plan, which aims to set out the process and methods for responding to future outbreaks, (to be published spring 2022).

What is the situation elsewhere in the UK?

England

The [Prime Minister’s statement to the House of Commons](#) (21/2/22) set out a “strategy for living with Covid”, which included four principles to structure the approach in England, as summarised below:

Removing all remaining domestic restrictions in law.

- From 24 February - end the legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test, and also end self-isolation support payments, although covid provisions for statutory sick pay can still be claimed for a further month
- End routine contact tracing, and no longer ask fully vaccinated close contacts and those under 18 to test daily for seven days; and remove the legal requirement for close contacts who are not fully vaccinated to self-isolate

- Until 1 April - still advise people who test positive to stay at home, but after that encourage people with covid-19 symptoms to “exercise personal responsibility”
- (Immediately) remove guidance for staff and students in most education and childcare settings to undertake twice-weekly asymptomatic testing
- from 1 April -end free symptomatic and asymptomatic testing for the general public; continue to provide free symptomatic tests to the oldest age groups and those most vulnerable to covid. And work “with retailers to ensure that everyone who wants to can buy a test”
- From 1 April - no longer recommend the use of voluntary covid-status certification, (NHS app will continue to allow people to indicate their vaccination status for international travel.)
- expire all temporary provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020. “Of the original 40, 20 have already expired and 16 will expire on 24 March. The last four, relating to innovations in public service, will expire six months later”

Protecting the most vulnerable with targeted vaccines and treatments.

This included a specific announcement that based on JCVI advice there would be:

- a new spring booster offered to those aged 75 and over, to older care home residents, and to those over 12 who are immunosuppressed

Additional action highlighted was that enough doses of vaccine had been procured “to anticipate a wide range of possible Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommendations”, as well as antivirals and therapeutics, “with our Antivirals Taskforce securing a supply of almost 5 million”

Resilience to respond to resurgences and new variants

Measures highlighted included:

- the Office for National Statistics survey, “to continue tracking the virus in granular detail, with regional and age breakdowns”
- preparing and maintaining capabilities to ramp up testing
- continuing to support other countries in developing their own surveillance capabilities
- donating 100 million vaccine doses by June

Building on innovation

Measures highlighted included:

- Continuation of the vaccines taskforce, and the therapeutics taskforce, which will continue to support seven national priority clinical trial platforms focused on prevention, novel treatments and treatments for long-covid
- refreshing biosecurity strategy “to protect the UK against natural zoonosis and accidental laboratory leaks, as well as the potential for biological threats emanating from state and non-state actors”
- working with international partners on future pandemic preparedness, including through a new pandemic treaty; an effective early warning system or global pandemic radar; and a mission to make safe and effective diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines available within the first 100 days of a future pandemic threat being identified. The UK will also host a global pandemic preparedness summit next month.

Wales

In Wales, [restrictions and requirements have been reducing](#), and for example:

- From 18 February - domestic COVID Pass are longer a legal requirement for entry to events and venues
- From 28 February, face coverings legally required only in retail, public transport and health and care settings

The Welsh Economy Minister, Vaughan Gething, [said on 11 February](#) that self-isolation rules could change from being law to guidance next month.

More recent [reports suggested](#) it was “unclear” how Wales will test for Covid after the Prime minister announced the end of free testing for most from 1 April

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland [Health Minister Robin Swann had previously said](#) (14 February) that all remaining Covid-19 restrictions in Northern Ireland would be lifted. He said the remaining measures "should no longer be set out in regulations" and instead will be put in guidance issued to the public. These restrictions included:

- Requirements to wear face coverings in public places
- Business owners having measures in place to limit transmission of the virus

- The use of Covid certification at nightclubs and large unseated indoor events
- Limits on numbers meeting indoors in private homes

Measures which had previously been guidance rather than law, such as working from home where possible, have not been changed.

The [Department for Health said on Monday](#) (21 February 2022) that it would “carefully consider the UK Government’s Living with COVID Plan for England and its implications for Northern Ireland, and that “No decisions have been taken on any changes to Test and Trace in Northern Ireland”

The Department also announced (21 February 2022) a [spring COVID-19 booster vaccination](#) will be offered to those aged 75 and over, as well as anyone over the age of 12 who is immunosuppressed.

Simon Wakefield

SPICe Research,

23 February 2022

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The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot