Ireland placed on Level 5 Restrictions of the Plan for Living with COVID-19 - with a number of specific adjustments

From Department of the Taoiseach

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The government has today agreed that from midnight on 24 December until 12 January, Level 5 restrictions will apply nationally. There will be a number of specific adjustments to Level 5 and, in addition, certain transitional arrangements will apply during the Christmas period.

The government has considered a number of factors in arriving at this decision, including NPHET concerns at the rapid increase in COVID-19 case numbers over recent days, the nature of social interaction likely to take place over the Christmas period involving mixing between younger and older people and the risk that this could lead to a wave of infection with a higher risk age profile.

The government has also considered the economic and social impacts of the re-introduction of Level 5 restrictions. A double rate of Covid Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS) will be paid for two weeks to businesses that are forced to close as a direct result of government restrictions on 26 December. Commercial rates relief will apply for affected areas for Q1 2021.

The adjustments to Level 5 are as follows:

- non-essential retail may remain open. The retail sector will be requested to defer January sales events
- gyms, leisure centres and swimming pools may remain open for individual training only
- outdoor golf and tennis are permitted. Participants should be from a maximum of 2 households
- hotels may only open for essential non-social and non-tourist purposes except for guests who already have a booking and are due to check in up to and including 26 December
- you must remain within your county (as opposed to within 5km of your home) apart from travel for work, education or other essential purposes
- non-contact training in pods of up to 15 may take place outdoors
- no matches/events should take place except for professional and elite sports and horse racing and greyhound racing behind closed doors

The specific transitional arrangements for the Christmas period are as follows:
**Hospitality**

From 3pm on 24 December:

- restaurants and pubs operating as restaurants will close
- hotels may provide food and bar services to guests only after that point

**Social/Family Gatherings(*)**

(*) For those who are part of a support bubble, the bubble counts as one household.

Up to and including 26 December:

- visits from up to 2 other households will be permitted

Up to and including 31 December:

- visits from one other household will be permitted

From 1 January:

- no visitors are permitted in private homes/gardens (except for essential family reasons such as providing care to children, elderly or vulnerable people, or as part of a support bubble)

**Travel**

- travel outside your county will continue to be permitted up to and including 26 December. Those away from their place of residence after that period will be permitted to return to their place of residence

**Religious services**

- Christmas religious services may take place, but will move online after 25 December when places of worship may remain open for private prayer

**Weddings**

Up to and including 2 January 2020:

- weddings can have up to 25 guests

From 3 January:

- weddings can have up to 6 guests

The government has also agreed that the current restrictions on travel from Britain to Ireland should remain in place until at least 31 December, but kept under constant review in the light of unfolding information and circumstances.
Notes

Level 5 provisions

- up to 6 guests only are permitted at weddings
- up to 10 mourners only permitted at funerals
- religious services are online but places of worship may open for private prayer
- no organised indoor or outdoor gatherings should take place
- no matches or sports events are permitted, with exemptions for professional, elite sports and horse racing and greyhound racing behind closed doors
- non-contact training can take place outdoors in pods of up to 15 people. Individual training only is permitted indoors. No indoor exercise or dance classes are permitted
- hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs are open for those with essential non-social and non-tourist purposes
- nightclubs, discos and casinos remain closed
- personal services must close
- people should continue to work from home unless essential for work which is an essential health, social care or other essential service and cannot be done from home
- public transport capacity should be restricted at 25%
- outdoor playgrounds, play areas and parks to remain open
- LTRC Facilities visiting: suspended, aside from critical and compassionate circumstances
- childcare services, early learning and schools remain open
- higher, further and adult education should remain primarily online
- museums, galleries, libraries and other cultural attractions are closed

Supports to businesses

The Covid Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS) which supports businesses significantly impacted by public health restrictions; qualifying businesses will be eligible for up to a weekly maximum payment of €5000; to date, payments totalling €114m in respect of 15,600 business premises have been made under CRSS.

In addition, as previously announced by the government, businesses benefiting from CRSS for the weeks of 28 December and 4 January will receive a double payment up to a maximum of €5000 and should restrictions last for three weeks or more, businesses in receipt of CRSS will be eligible for payment of an additional weeks restart payment on reopening at the end of the period of restrictions.

Commercial rates relief will apply for affected sectors for the first three months of 2021.

The Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) which provides support of €350 per week per eligible employee to help maintain people in jobs – to date €1.2bn in support has been provided under the scheme, replacing the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, which provided support of over €2.5bn between March and August.
Other supports include extensive tax warehousing arrangements; reduced VAT rates, both at the standard rate and at the lower rate for the hospitality and tourism sectors; the spend and stay scheme; a range of reduced cost loans, grants and voucher schemes, such as the €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme, COVID-19 Business Loans from Microfinance Ireland, the Sustaining Enterprise Fund, and Trading Online Vouchers.

In addition, the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment of up to €350 per week will continue to be available to all employees and the self-employed who have lost their job due to the pandemic.