The government has today agreed that additional public health restrictions will apply under Level 5 of the Plan for Living with COVID.

Noting the advice from NPHET that the current situation with the virus has deteriorated to the point where there is an absolute need to reduce the level of mobility and congregation in order to reduce all opportunities for transmission, people continue to be urged to stay at home except for absolutely essential reasons. The following measures have been put in place to support this:

**Schools**

Schools will remain closed to students until 1st February. During this time, remote learning will be put in place by schools and supported by school staff, and schools will communicate plans directly with families. Exceptions are in place, including a provision for all final year Leaving Certificate students to attend school for 3 days a week commencing the week of 11th January, and certain provisions for special education and specialised settings. See notes below for complete list of exceptions.

**Early Childhood Care and Education**

The resumption of the ECCE programme is delayed until 1st February.

**Childcare**
Childcare services, including regulated childminders, will remain closed with the exception of services for vulnerable children and children of essential workers. Other existing childcare arrangements can continue to operate for vulnerable children and children of essential workers only. In addition, a household of an essential worker, without an existing childcare arrangement, can form a bubble with another household for the purpose of providing childcare.

**Construction**

Construction will be closed with effect from 6pm on Friday 8th January, with limited exceptions for essential cases. (See notes).

**Click and Collect**

Click and collect from non-essential retail outlets should no longer be permitted with immediate effect. (Existing orders may be collected). Click and deliver will continue to be permitted.

**International Travel**

The government also agreed that the current travel moratorium in place for travel from Great Britain and South Africa is extended until midnight Friday 8th January 2021. From 9th January 2021, all passengers arriving at Irish airports and ports whose journey originates in Great Britain or South Africa will be requested to have evidence of a negative result from a PCR Covid-19 test taken up to 72 hours prior to arrival in Ireland.

This new mandatory requirement will be in place until 31st January 2021, and will be kept under review in light of the evolving epidemiological situation.

**Supports**

It is fully recognised that these further restrictions will be very difficult for people. The government has also today decided to maintain, at current levels, the payments available under both the Employment Wage Support Scheme (EWSS) and the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). This will ensure continued support for both employers and workers who lose their jobs due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions.

Under the EWSS, which provides a subsidy to qualifying employers to offset payroll costs, a payment of up to €350 per week will continue to be available. This enhanced payment level, which had been scheduled to fall from 1st February, will remain in place until the 31st March.

Similarly, the PUP available to those who have lost their jobs, including the self-employed, as a result of COVID-19, will continue to be made available at the current pay-related level of up to €350 a week until 31st March. This payment level had been scheduled to fall from 1st February.
In addition, the government continues to make available a wide range of supports for businesses.

Notes to editors

Schools

- schools remain closed to students until 1st February. During this time, remote learning will be supported by school staff, and schools will communicate their remote learning plans directly with families
- there are two exceptions to this, provision for certain special education and for final year Leaving Certificate students
- special schools and special classes and specialised settings (such as Oberstown and high support special care schools and youth encounter projects) will continue fully open from 11th January
- all final year Leaving Certificate students will attend school for 3 days a week commencing from week beginning 11th January
- Youthreach services will resume as scheduled
- school transport will be available for eligible students attending school
- teachers, SNAs and other school staff will be allowed to travel to school as essential workers.
- school buildings will be open to allow for staff to facilitate distance learning
- guidance services and supports will continue to be available to students and can be made available in the manner deemed appropriate by the school

Construction

Construction will close from 6pm Friday 8th January, with limited exceptions including:

- essential health and related projects including those relevant to preventing, limiting, minimising or slowing the spread of Covid-19.
- social housing projects, including voids, designated as essential sites by Local Authorities based on set criteria.
- housing adaptation grants where the homeowner is agreeable to adaptations being undertaken in their home.
- repair, maintenance and construction of critical transport and utility infrastructure.
- education facilities sites designated as essential by Department of Education.
- supply and delivery of essential or emergency maintenance and repair services to businesses and places of residence (including electrical, gas, plumbing, glazing and roofing services) on an emergency call-out basis.
- certain large construction projects in the exporting / FDI sector based on set criteria.

Supports

EWSS

Since its introduction in September 2020, over €1.5bn in support has been provided under the Employment Wage Support Scheme in order to protect jobs and assist businesses.
PUP

Since its introduction in March 2020, over €5bn has been paid out through the Pandemic Unemployment Payment in order to support workers and their families throughout the pandemic.

Additional Supports

The government continues to make available a wide range of supports for businesses including the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme; extensive tax warehousing arrangements; reduced VAT rates, both at the standard rate and at the lower rate for the hospitality and tourism sectors, a commercial rates waiver, and a wide 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.