

Address to the nation by Taoiseach Micheál Martin on 16 November 2021

From [Department of the Taoiseach](#)

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Dia dhaoibh

This evening, all across Europe and across our country, it is increasingly clear that we are experiencing another surge of COVID-19 infection.

In the last week, we have seen the second highest rate of hospital admission in all of 2021.

We have developed and deployed a massive PCR testing and tracing operation – up to 25,000 tests per day. Yet it is still estimated that for every four detected cases there may be as many as another six asymptomatic, undetected cases in the community.

Clearly, this is too high.

This is the fourth surge in infections that we have experienced as a country, but this time it is different. It is different because of the extraordinary success of our National Vaccination Programme.

Without it, there is no doubt that we would now be in a full scale lockdown.

Because of the vaccination programme and your commitment to it, we are able to keep society and the economy open.

But continued progress in the journey to normal conditions is not inevitable.

The increased socialisation that we now enjoy comes at a cost. And that cost is an increased risk of infection.

Our health service, which has endured so much since the outbreak of COVID-19, is managing these increased numbers, while also maintaining elective treatment.

And with the return to work and increased socialisation after such a long period of isolation, our hospitals and General Practices across the country are seeing a huge increase in the numbers of people presenting with non-COVID-19 problems.

One example to illustrate this point is the number of our children requiring non-COVID-19 hospital care: In the six weeks to mid November 2019, the number of children admitted to hospital was below 12,000. Already in the same six-week period in 2021, more than 20,000 children have been cared for in our hospitals.

Our doctors, nurses and care staff are doing an exceptional job in very challenging and difficult circumstances, but obviously if the number of COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations continues to grow at the rate we are currently seeing, no health system anywhere in the world would be able to cope.

The surge that we are now experiencing is a dramatic reminder of what this virus can do and the threat that it continues to represent.

We need to act now to deal with this surge.

I have always been clear that protecting public health is our first responsibility. I have also been clear that the government will not hesitate to respond to changes in the profile of the disease, and that is what we have done today.

The range of measures that we have agreed represent, I believe, an appropriate response to the situation we find ourselves in.

The vaccination and booster programme remain at the core of our response to the disease. Booster shots are currently being administered to those over 60 in the community and those in residential care facilities, the immunocompromised and healthcare workers.

Following last night's decision, we will now make arrangements for its roll-out to everyone in the country with an underlying condition and to everyone else over the age of 50.

The evidence internationally and our own experience with those over 80 who have received a booster is extremely encouraging. Evidence from the UK and elsewhere shows that the booster not only restores the immunity level achieved by two doses, but increases it.

However, we have also agreed a series of additional measures that strengthen the non-pharmaceutical protections that are already in place.

Firstly, we have paused what was already a phased and cautious return to the workplace and our advice is now that everyone should work from home unless it is absolutely necessary that they attend in person.

Next, we have considered what impact the reopening of hospitality has had on the disease.

We want hospitality to remain open, and we continue to work with the sectors to ensure that the current rules around COVID passes and other protections are being properly observed.

I want to re-emphasise to every business owner and every customer how important this is. When customers are vaccinated the virus is less likely to spread and is less likely to have a serious impact.

Requiring COVID passes is a proportionate and effective public health measure and these rules must be followed.

We have also decided that the closing time for all on-licensed premises will be midnight, with all customers having to vacate the premises by that time.

The requirement for COVID passes, based on vaccination or recovery, will now be put on a statutory basis for cinemas and theatres. Many are already doing this, but the requirement now applies to all.

Regardless of vaccination status, all household close contacts of a confirmed case should now restrict movement for five days, pending completion of a recommended antigen test.

We have expanded the use of antigen testing and we are further increasing their use throughout society.

Ag an bpointe seo caithfimid mar phobal a bheith fíorchúramach na treoracha sláinte poiblí a leanúint.

Ní neart go cur le chéile agus sinn ag faire amach do dhaoine eile timpeall orainn.

Is den bhfíorthábhacht é a bheith cúramach anois agus má dhéanaimid sin cabhróidh aire agus cúram faoi láthair linn go fadtéarmach agus sinn ag iarraidh dul I ngleic leis an víreas seo.

I know that the picture emerging across Europe and the increasing numbers over the last week in our own country are a cause of deep concern. And I know that no one wants to go back to a world of widespread restrictions.

That is what this evening is about.

That is what these changes are about.

Our collective effort over so many months, our shared trust in science and engagement with the vaccination programme, have brought us to the point where virtually all of society and the economy has reopened.

It is only our collective effort – full adherence to the rules that remain in place, making sure we are vaccinated and taking our booster when it becomes available, working from home if we're able to, wearing our masks, keeping our distance and being aware of our environment;

it is only this collective effort that will keep our society and economy open;

that will sustain and maintain our progress;

that will keep us healthy and safe.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh.