

# Speech by Taoiseach Micheál Martin from Government Buildings - Friday, 28 May 2021

From [Department of the Taoiseach](#)

By: [Taoiseach](#); [Micheál Martin](#)

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Dia Dhaoibh

Each time I've stood here and discussed the next steps, I've asked you to continue to exercise caution and to trust the science.

Indeed, throughout the course of the pandemic, as a country we have trusted the science and our approach has been cautious.

While I know and genuinely appreciate that this has sometimes been a source of frustration, particularly for some sectors of our economy, I am satisfied that on the most important measure of all – the protection of lives and public health, it has been the correct one.

Our collective trust in science has been demonstrated in many ways.

It can be seen in our ongoing adherence to the restrictions that remain in place, and it can be seen in the prominence of medical and scientific experts in all of our public debate.

But perhaps the most dramatic and constructive evidence of our respect for science is the level of uptake of the vaccine in our country.

By every measure, the Irish people trust the vaccines.

In fact our country enjoys one of the highest levels of trust in the vaccine in the world.

And you are right to have that trust.

It is clear that the Irish people are embracing the National Vaccination Programme and that it is powering ahead.

More than 2.6 million vaccines have now been administered and half the eligible population of the country will have received at least one vaccine by Monday.

Registration of the online system is now open for everyone aged over 45, and next week, we hope to open it for everyone over 40.

The take up has been extraordinary.

Nearly 90% of those aged 60-69 have started vaccination. Among those 50-59, almost 90% have registered and almost 80% have started vaccination.

Almost 100% of our citizens over the age of 70 are now fully vaccinated.

This is unsurpassed in the European Union.

The evidence of the vaccine's positive impact on hospitalisation, serious illness and death is absolutely beyond doubt.

The strategy is working.

Faoi láthair tá dul chun cinn maith á dhéanamh againn ó thaobh athoscailt na tíre de.

Mar a deir an seanfhocal, I ndiaidh a chéile a thógtar na caisleáin.

Cé go gcaithfimid go léir a bheith fíorchúramach i gcónaí, is léir go bhfuil an lámh in uachtar faighte againn ar an víreas a bhuí le sárchomhoibriú ó mhuintir na hÉireann le breis agus bliain anuas. Tá gaisce déanta ag pobal na tíre gan amhras.

Now, the challenge is to keep moving forward, safely.

Remembering all the time our determination to make sure that when we reopen each part of our society and economy, it stays open.

Given our progress in the vaccination programme during the month of May and the current levels of the virus in our society, all of the measures that we hoped to introduce in June will now go ahead.

So, from 2 June, Hotels, B&Bs, guesthouses and self catering accommodation can reopen for guests, and from 7 June, outdoor services in bars and restaurants can recommence.

And now, along with all the other measures announced previously, we are able to add the following changes:

- from 7 June, up to 200 people can attend outdoor events in venues with a minimum capacity of 5000, and up to 100 can attend other outdoor events
- cinemas and theatres will also reopen
- in light of the very genuine concerns regarding road safety, we will also see a start to the reopening of driver theory test services and an incremental reopening of Driver Test Centres
- we will see the phased reopening of day centres for older people
- there will also be a number of pilot sporting and cultural events taking place in June and early July, to test the logistical requirements for further reopening

It is important to emphasise that we are able to take these steps because our overall strategy is working and because all of you have made the right choices.

Before I outline what we would like to do in July and August, I really want to emphasise one key point.

Continued progress is not inevitable.

Change brings risk. We still have a journey to go with our vaccination programme, and we are monitoring very closely what impact new variants, especially the B.1.6.1.7 “Indian” variant has on the spread of the virus.

But subject to us continuing to make progress, we will move to the next phase of reopening.

This will mean that from 5 July:

- we will see the return of indoor services in restaurants and bars
- indoor events will recommence, with maximum of 100 attendees in larger venues and 50 in all others
- we will see a further increase in the numbers attending outdoor events
- indoor exercise and sports activities will return
- there will be further relaxation on visits to private homes
- and up to 50 guests will be able to attend wedding receptions

I am also conscious that many sectors of our society want and need some indication of what plans they might need to make for later in the summer.

And so, subject to continued progress against the virus, we would like to make the following changes in August...

From 5 August, we will see:

- a further increase in numbers attending indoor events, with 200 in larger venues and 100 in all others
- a further increase in number attending outdoor events
- the 50% capacity restriction on public transport will be lifted
- and up to 100 guests will be able to attend weddings

Our direction of travel is clear and is very positive.

To continue in this direction, it is important that we all adhere to public health guidelines and make sensible personal decisions.

The government’s number one priority will always be to protect life and public health.

That said, we are also very focussed on the great task of rebuilding our society and economy as we emerge from the pandemic.

Much work has already been done on this, and next week, we will launch our National Economic Recovery Plan.

This will chart a way forward for our country – one where we can quickly overcome the deep economic damage of the pandemic and overcome deep societal challenges.

In the meantime I am conscious of the particular challenges faced by some of those sectors that have been closed the longest and have suffered the most.

In response, the government has today agreed a number of interim supports to help these sectors reopen.

Pubs and bars that do not serve food have paid a very heavy price over the last year. To help them reopen successfully and safely, the government has introduced a one off grant scheme.

The impact of the virus on the events industry has been simply devastating and the government will be bringing forward new supports for this industry in the coming week.

And let me say to every sector, the government will continue to actively engage with you and to move as quickly as possible as circumstances permit.

While the unprecedented range of supports that are now in place across the economy will not fully compensate for a year and more of lost business, they demonstrate, I hope, the absolute commitment of this government to rebuild our society and economy.

I want to talk now for a moment about international travel.

I understand the importance of our aviation and tourism sectors – international connectivity is critical to this country's success and place in the world and many jobs and livelihoods across the country depend on it.

I understand the pent-up desire of very many people to have a break overseas or to welcome friends and family from abroad.

But I also understand very clearly the need to get this right, and to make sure that we restore international travel in a safe and sustainable way.

At my most recent meeting with European Leaders last week, we confirmed our support for EU Digital COVID Certificates for travel within the EU. Today at Government we agreed to fully operate that scheme from 19 July.

This will facilitate a return to international travel in accordance with clear safety protocols.

This is an important time for us all.

After the trauma of the last 15 months, we are finally taking definite steps towards enjoying normal times with friends and loved ones again.

We are almost back to a point where we can just enjoy the ordinary, extraordinary moments in our lives.

The sense of hope, excitement and relief is palpable.

But as we watch what is happening across the globe, we of course know that we must remain vigilant against this terrible virus.

We know there have been many twists and turns on this journey.

I have talked many times about the strength that is found in solidarity and how managing the pandemic must be a collective effort.

This coming month could be the most important test of that spirit that we have faced since this ordeal began.

Tonight, I have set out the roadmap for the coming months.

Our continued progress along that roadmap will depend on each of us thinking about all of us.

We all want out of the restrictions, but that will require each of us, as individuals, business owners, arts and sports officers, as friends, neighbours and family, to stick to the guidelines that are still in place for the coming period.

If we continue to mind each other,

If we continue to make the right choices,

be vigilant,

take our vaccine when our turn comes;

If we continue to do all these things,

the end of this is within our grasp.