

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

S.R. 2021 No. 97

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Department of Health and is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly to accompany the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021.
- 1.2 The Statutory Rule is made under sections 25C(1), (3)(c), (4)(d) and 25F(2) of the Public Health Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 (“the 1967 Act”) and is subject to the emergency procedure under section 25Q of that Act.

2. Purpose of the Regulations

- 2.1 The Rule amends the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 (“the principal regulations”).
- 2.2 The Rule provides for a click and collect service to be provided by non-essential retailers, allowing certain visitors to venues hosting wedding or civil partnership ceremonies, allowing up to ten people to meet outside at a private dwelling, removing regulation 14 (Restrictions on movement), and permitting the opening of further retail businesses as set out in the schedule 1; along with changes of a technical nature.

3. Matters of special interest to the Northern Ireland Assembly

- 3.1 The Statutory Rule is made under the emergency procedure set out in section 25Q of the 1967 Act. The Regulations are made without a draft having been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly. The Department of Health is of the opinion that, by reason of urgency, it is necessary to make these Regulations without a draft being so laid and approved so that public health measures can be introduced, amended or withdrawn in response to the latest risk assessment associated with the incidence and spread of coronavirus disease.
- 3.2 These Regulations come into operation on 9 April 2021. The Rule is available on the Department of Health website. The Regulations cease to have effect at the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which the Statutory Rule is made unless, during that period, the Statutory Rule is approved by a resolution of the Assembly.

4. Legislative Context

- 4.1 The 1967 Act and regulations made under it provide a legislative framework for health protection in Northern Ireland.
- 4.2 Part 1A of the 1967 Act, as inserted by the Coronavirus Act 2020 (“the 2020 Act”), provides a legal basis to protect the public from threats arising from infectious disease or contamination with coronavirus, and includes powers to

impose restrictions or requirements on people, and in relation to things and premises, for use in rare circumstances where voluntary cooperation cannot be obtained. Overall, Part 1A of the 1967 Act sets out a framework for health protection which requires much of the detailed provisions to be delivered through regulations.

- 4.3 Section 25C of the 1967 Act provides a power for the Department of Health to make regulations to prevent, protect against, control or provide a public health response to the incidence or spread of infection or contamination with coronavirus in Northern Ireland. The threat can come from outside Northern Ireland.
- 4.4 These Regulations are made under section 25C to enable public health measures to be introduced, amended or withdrawn in respect of the public health risks posed by the incidence and spread of coronavirus disease.

5. Policy background

- 5.1 The temporary modifications to the 1967 Act made by the Coronavirus Act 2020 provide regulation making powers that were previously not available in Northern Ireland.
- 5.2 Previously the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 provided for a range of restrictions on movement, gatherings and businesses. A series of 31 Amendment Regulations were subsequently made, gradually easing the restrictions and closures and/ or imposing additional restrictions where considered necessary.
- 5.3 Regulation 29 of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 revokes the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (as amended). Regulation 2 sets out the duty to review the need for restrictions or requirements. Regulation 3 provides a requirement to close certain businesses and premises specified in Schedule 1. Regulations 9 and 12 provide restrictions on gatherings, including specific restrictions on gatherings in private premises. Regulations 13 and 14 outline restrictions on movement away from home. Regulation 18 defines Enforcement officers and premises improvement notices. Regulations 20 to 23 provide for enforcement, offences and fixed penalties. Regulation 31 provides for the regulations to expire on 12 October 2021.
- 5.4 There has been a gradual decrease in COVID-19 cases since the high point of early January, following the spike which was a result of pre-Christmas relaxations. Restrictions have been in place since late December to prevent further spread of the virus. More than 2,000 people have died as a result of Covid-19 in Northern Ireland, and the health service has been under extreme and sustained pressure. However with the combination of reducing case numbers and the success of the vaccination programme, the Executive produced a ‘Pathway to Recovery’ document, outlining the plan to gradually exit out of the current restrictions.
- 5.5 The now repealed Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (as amended) had over 30 amendment regulations made to the “No.2 Regulations” reflecting both the evolving nature of the pandemic, as well as minor technical changes required. As such The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 have been

introduced to offer a clear platform for the multiple sets of relaxation amendments that are expected, via the Executive's pathway to recovery plan

5.6 The Statutory Rule amends the principal regulations, as follows:

- a) Regulation 4(3)(b) permits non-essential retailers to provide a 'click and collect' service;
- b) Regulation 9(4)(f) permits up to 4 visitors to a place where a marriage ceremony or civil partnership ceremony may take place, for the purpose of viewing the facilities, provided there is one member of staff and no more than one visit at any such time.
- c) Regulation 9(7)(b) removes the 25 person limits on persons attending funerals, and Regulation 9(8)(a) on marriage and civil partnership ceremonies;
- d) Regulation 11(3)(d) permits a sporting event for up to 15 persons which is for the purpose of training organised by a club, individual or individuals affiliated, in each case, to a relevant sporting body or to an organisation that regulates and provides advice and guidance to members on matters relating to sport and physical activities;
- e) Regulation 12(1)(b) increases from 6 to 10 the number of people from 2 households who may gather outdoors at a private dwelling;
- f) Regulation 14 is removed, relating to restriction of movement, namely being away from a place of residence without a reasonable excuse;
- g) Regulation 15(1)(d) requires anyone organising a gathering for the purposes of viewing the facilities for a marriage or civil partnership ceremony must record the relevant visitor information
- h) Schedule 1 permits the opening of outdoor retail including (part 1) car washes and (part 2) motor vehicle dealerships, garden centres and plant nurseries

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Given the rapidly evolving global situation regarding the spread of coronavirus disease there has been no public consultation in relation to this Statutory Rule.

7. Equality impact

- 7.1 Given the rapidly evolving global situation regarding the spread of coronavirus disease there has been no assessment of equality impacts in relation to this Statutory Rule.
- 7.2 The public health restrictions and requirements introduced by the principal Regulations are part of a range of measures designed to assist and support efforts

to protect the population of Northern Ireland by seeking to limit the spread of coronavirus disease.

8. Regulatory impact

- 8.1 Given the rapidly evolving global situation regarding the spread of coronavirus disease there has been no assessment of regulatory impacts in relation to this Statutory Rule.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 Given the rapidly evolving global situation regarding the spread of coronavirus disease there has been no assessment of the financial impacts in relation to this Statutory Rule.

10. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

- 10.1 The Department of Health has considered section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and is satisfied that these Regulations are not incompatible with any of the Convention rights; are not incompatible with Community law; do not discriminate against a person or class of person on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion; and do not modify an enactment in breach of section 7 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

11. EU implications

- 11.1 There are unlikely to be any EU implications.
- 11.2 This Statutory Rule does not relate to withdrawal from the European Union / trigger the statement requirements under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act.

12. Parity or Replicatory Measure

- 12.1 Not applicable.

13. Additional information

- 13.1 Not applicable