

### **The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 6) Regulations 2020**

#### **Introduction**

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented calls on the health system as well as policy and financial decisions that have made fundamental changes to everyday life for people in Scotland. While it has been necessary to take these extraordinary measures to respond to the pandemic, in order to protect the right to life and the right to health for Scotland's population, the unequal impact of the pandemic and the requirement to have due regard to the need to advance equality, eliminate discrimination and foster good relations (as per our Public Sector Equality Duty), and take an integrated and balanced approach to ensuring the proportionality of the measures taken, have also been at the forefront of consideration of these actions during this emergency situation.
2. The *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Framework for Decision-Making and Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis* ("the Route Map") published earlier this year made clear that COVID-19 is first and foremost a public health crisis, and the measures to combat it have been necessary to save lives. The *Framework for Decision-Making* identified four main categories of harm: **direct health impacts, non-COVID-19 health harms, societal impacts and economic impacts**. These harms are deeply inter-related: health harms impact on society and the economy, just as the societal and economic effects impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing.
3. On Friday 23 October 2020, we published *COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework* ("the strategic framework").<sup>1</sup> This new framework sets out how we intend to respond to the crisis over the coming period, across the four key harms of the virus. It details how we will work to suppress the virus and sets out our proposal to move to a strategic approach to outbreak management based on five levels of protection, across many aspects of our lives.
4. Some harms will be felt over different time horizons: short, medium and long-term. Some may not be fully understood for many months or even years, such as the long term impacts on mental health and school attainment. However, even in these initial stages, it is clear that impacts have not been felt equally across the population. Consideration of the continued, but differential, impacts at the different levels is therefore critical to the decision making process.

#### **Legislative background**

5. The UK Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The Scottish Government immediately used powers conferred by that Act to bring forward the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 ("the first regulations"), to implement physical distancing and impose restrictions on gatherings, events and operation of business activity. They came into force on Thursday 26 March 2020.
6. The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 came into force on 14 September 2020 and revoked and replaced the first regulations. They make provision which is substantially similar to the first regulations, as amended at the date on which they were revoked.
7. On 9 October 2020, the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Additional Temporary Restrictions) Regulations 2020 ("the additional temporary restrictions") set out additional restrictions, both nationally and specific to the central belt. These regulations suspended the effect of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 while the additional temporary restriction regulations were in force.

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<sup>1</sup> [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Scotland's Strategic Framework - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-strategic-framework/pages/1-introduction-and-what-we-will-do-to-stop-the-virus-spread.aspx)

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The additional temporary restriction regulations were due to expire on 26 October 2020 but were extended by amendment until 6.00 am on 2 November 2020 to allow for consultation on the levels-based approach.

8. The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 (Levels regulations) implemented the new strategic framework and were published on 30 October 2020 and came into effect at 0600 hours on 2 November 2020. These regulations revoked the additional temporary restrictions regulations and the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2020.
9. These Regulations amend the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Regulations 2020, including to modify the Levels regulations during the period from and including 23 December 2020 to 27 December 2020.
10. As soon as the Scottish Ministers consider that any restriction or requirement is no longer necessary to prevent, protect against, control or provide a public health response to the incidence or spread of infection in Scotland with coronavirus, they must revoke that restriction or requirement.
11. The *Framework for Decision Making* makes clear that the reviews will be informed by assessments of options for relaxation or restriction under their impact on the four harms, their viability, and broader considerations including equality impacts, the impact on individual rights and consideration of measures, for example, for specific geographies and sectors.
12. The Scottish Government considered from the outset whether the lockdown provisions were consistent with the Equality Act 2010 and also considered whether the provisions could constitute indirect discrimination. In many cases, the provisions have applied to all persons irrespective of protected characteristic, although we acknowledge that the same provision may not have equal impacts. Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) have been carried out to consider the likely or anticipated impact of the measures contained in the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 and for the respective legislation thereafter, as mentioned in paragraphs five, six, seven and eight above. Where some possible negative impacts have been identified, the Scottish Government has considered these to be justified as both a necessary and proportionate means of achieving the legitimate aim of protecting the general public from the threats posed by the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic and, therefore, the threat to human life in Scotland; and has sought to mitigate disadvantage wherever possible, e.g. developing exemption cards for people whose health or disability makes the wearing of face coverings unsuitable. However, from the beginning, measures were put in place to support people with protected characteristics as they complied with lockdown guidance, such as the £350 million of community funding announced on the 18 March 2020.
13. The impact assessment has identified some potential positive impacts on one or more of the protected characteristics. Reductions in the spread of coronavirus are designed to positively affect the whole population, but will particularly affect the health of those people who are more severely affected by the disease.
14. This includes older people (age), those with underlying health conditions (some disabled people are more likely to experience severe ill-health from contracting COVID-19 than the general population), ethnicity and sex. [Early data](#) showed that the COVID-19 virus was more deadly for people with underlying health conditions. Prevalence of some of these health conditions is known to be higher in certain ethnic groups<sup>2</sup>, for example Type 2 diabetes is 6 times more likely in people of South Asian descent and over 2 times more likely in African and Afro-Caribbean people<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>SAGE:[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/89584/1/S0483\\_Ethnicity\\_and\\_Covid-19.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/89584/1/S0483_Ethnicity_and_Covid-19.pdf)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.diabetes.co.uk/south-asian/>

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15. As we follow the levels approach, some changes will be delivered through regulations, such as amending regulations to allow for local areas to move in or out of a level. Other measures will be delivered through changes to guidance, such as expectations for employers to support the wellbeing of those who return to work in hospitality settings. However, all measures are given thorough consideration on the basis of their impact, including on equality and human rights<sup>4</sup>.

### Policy Objectives

16. We published our Strategic Framework and levels table in response to the rising number of COVID-19 cases seen recently in Scotland, and increase in hospital and intensive care unit (ICU) admissions. A paper published on 7 October 2020 sums up the evidence on infection trends, confirmed cases, hospital use and deaths, and how these vary across Scotland and is available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-evidence-paper-october-2020/>.
17. The framework moved Scotland from the Route Map, which applies countrywide, into something that allows us to flex, on a much more transparent basis, depending on rates of transmission across different areas of the country. However, we recognise that many of the restrictions and requirements in place have a negative impact on some aspects of people's lives, such as increasing loneliness and social isolation, and have potential to deepen inequalities and damage our economy.

### *Holiday gatherings*

18. These Regulations introduce a number of changes that allow for a temporary modification of rules surrounding travel and gatherings over a short period in December 2020. These Regulations adjust the existing rules during the period from and including 23 December 2020 to 27 December 2020.
19. The Regulations allow a "holiday gathering" (also referred to as a bubble) to be attended as an exception to the restrictions on gatherings in private dwellings in Level 1, 2, 3 and 4 areas and the restrictions on gatherings in outdoor public places in Level 2, 3 and 4 areas. These must consist of no more than 8 people from no more than 3 households – under 12s do not count towards the 8 person limit but are included when counting the number of households attending a holiday gathering. The Regulations set out that a person or household may only take part in one holiday gathering to ensure household to household interaction remains limited over this period. These changes ensure that those who chose to take part in a holiday gathering are able to do so legally in small and controlled numbers.
20. The Regulations also modify the Levels regulations to add gathering as a holiday gathering to the list of examples of a purpose for which a contravention of the travel restrictions in Level 3 or 4 areas, or within the common travel area, will constitute a reasonable excuse. This ensures individuals or households are able to travel into or out of a Level 3 or 4 area if it is for the purpose of attending a holiday gathering during the specified period. Regulation 3B(2) further modifies the Levels Regulations to make special provision for travel to or from Northern Ireland on 22 December 2020.
21. The Regulations also set out that holiday gatherings can take place in holiday accommodation in the same local authority area of one of the households which are part of that gathering. This is to ensure that people who require a larger space for their gathering are able to do so in their local area without permitting increased travel to typical holiday locations in Scotland such as the Highlands

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<https://www.diabetes.co.uk/news/2013/jan/those-of-african-caribbean-descent-more-likely-to-have-diabetes-92672091.html>

<sup>4</sup> A summary of equality and Fairer Scotland evidence was published for Phase 1 and 2 of the Route Map. An update for Phase 3 is forthcoming. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-fairer-scotland-impact-assessment-evidence-gathered-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/>

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and islands, where transmission rates remain low. The holiday accommodation must be a private dwelling such as a self-catered cottage – hotels, hostels and bed and breakfasts must not be used given the shared nature of these environments. However, an individual household may make use of hotel, hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation when staying near (i.e. in the same local authority area as) the private dwelling in which they are forming a bubble. The bubble must not meet in hotel, hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation.

### **Socialising and Travel Measures - Winter Holidays December 2020**

In completing this assessment and, in common with previous impact assessments, we are mindful of the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED): to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This impact assessment identifies where measures may positively impact on people who share one or more of the protected characteristics<sup>5</sup>, and also recognises that the introduction of the measures may have a disproportionate negative impact on people who share one or more of the protected characteristics. Where any negative impacts are identified, we have sought to mitigate/eliminate these. We are also mindful that the equality duty is not just about negating or mitigating negative impacts, as we also have a positive duty to promote equality. We have sought to do this through support and guidance available.

COVID-19 virus transmission occurs primarily through close contact between individuals. Evidence continues to indicate that the virus can be transmitted by respiratory droplets and aerosols and direct contact with surfaces contaminated with virus. Close-range transmission is likely to be the most significant and is strongly associated with proximity and duration of contact in indoor environments. A range of social and residential settings have been associated with transmission, which includes crowded indoor settings.<sup>6</sup> A variety of interventions to combat the transmission of the virus have been adopted across the UK.<sup>7</sup> Limiting socialisation, particularly indoors, is one of the main interventions adopted to limit the number of individuals meeting up to reduce the risk of transmission.

The Scottish Government is of the view that restrictions on socialising as laid out in the Strategic Framework and the Levels Regulations are currently justified and a proportionate means of helping to achieve the legitimate aim of reducing the public health risks posed by coronavirus, thereby safeguarding the right to life. However, the Government also recognises that the festive period is a time when people of all faiths and none gather together with friends and family more than at any other time of the year. Loneliness and isolation can be more sharply felt at Christmas and a failure to acknowledge that is likely to disadvantage some of the people most at risk in society. As a result, restrictions on in-home socialising and travel will be lifted across the UK from 23-27 December 2020, in order to allow families and friends to form bubbles of up to 3 households with, in Scotland, a maximum of 8 people over the age of 12. The rules also apply outdoors.

It is important to note that this is a limited and temporary easement of restrictions, which will apply across Scotland and in relation to travel to and from the rest of the UK regardless of the existing levels as they apply locally. For example, somebody living in Level 4 area in Scotland would be able to travel to, and socialise with, a household in Wales. This is important, as it avoids discriminating against those living in higher level areas and promotes equality of outcome, for the festive period at least.

#### **Impact**

In common with the Levels Approach, the festive easement measures are intended to reduce the impact of the virus spreading while enabling households and people to meet, to maintain essential social networks and to provide some respite from the restrictions which people have been living with for most of 2020. The impact of not allowing some temporary easement of restrictions would be likely to worsen the impact of isolation and the negative impacts on mental health and well-being already being experienced by many. Furthermore, failure to ease restrictions would be likely to lead, in the opinion of behavioural scientists, to mass disobedience of the

<sup>5</sup> Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transmission-of-sars-cov-2-and-mitigating-measures-update-4-june-2020>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summary-of-the-effectiveness-and-harms-of-different-non-pharmaceutical-interventions-16-september-2020>

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regulations which would put lives at risk and damage the credibility of the Scottish Government’s COVID strategy. As such, the decision involves a balance of risk across the Four Harms assessment conducted for the Christmas period.

In the online guidance<sup>8</sup> and in ministerial communications and media appearances, it has been repeatedly stressed that the decision whether or not to take advantage of these easements is a personal one and that the safest decision remains to minimise social contact outside of households. This is particularly relevant to households containing older or clinically-at risk people, or those shielding for other reasons. Physical distancing advice still applies in the home, along with the other elements of the FACTS guidance such as washing hands.

For some people the temporary loosening of restrictions may increase anxiety and pressure to meet up with friends and families, when they would rather stay at home to be as safe as possible. Polling indicates that as many as one third of people may not wish to socialise outside their household. For others, anxiety and feelings of social isolation may be alleviated by people being able to spend time with a wider range of families and households, in some cases for the first time in many months.

It should also be noted that the individual categories listed below may be subject in many cases to compound disadvantage; e.g. a person may be a disabled, single-parent woman, or an older man from a minority ethnic background. People’s decisions about what is right for them should be guided by their circumstances and the extent to which their overlapping characteristics place them at greater or lesser risk.

### Travel measures adjustments – overview

There are a number of existing travel restrictions in place, as a reduction in non-essential travel will contribute to reducing the spread of infection. An EQFSIA for the travel restrictions is published at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-within-scotland-and-to-from-the-common-travel-area-impact-assessments/>.

However, in order to facilitate the festive gathering policy, the statutory travel controls will be temporarily adjusted to allow people to travel in order to form their Christmas bubble.

If there is travel to form a bubble, on arrival individuals must follow the rules about travel that apply in that local authority area. In a Level 3 or 4 area in Scotland, for example, non-essential travel outside the local authority area in which you are staying must be avoided. And in an area of Scotland at Level 0, 1, or 2 unnecessary travel into any Level 3 or 4 area must be avoided. In all areas the Scottish Government’s guidance on travel and transport should be followed.

<b>Differential impacts</b>	<p><b>Age: Children and Younger People</b></p>	<p>Children under 12 do not count towards the number of people in a household gathering, although they do count towards the number of households. This could have a positive effect on children under 12.</p> <p>Before the pandemic, younger people were more likely than those in older age groups to meet socially with friends, relatives, neighbours or work colleagues at least once a week. For those in areas with higher levels, this social contact in the home and outside it has been reduced, although schools and colleges have been open during the autumn term, which provides social contact for children and young adults.</p> <p>Some children and young people may be at a greater risk of neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse or sexual abuse in the home. For children and young people experiencing adverse home conditions, the ability to see more people inside and</p>
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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-festive-period/>



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	<p>outside the home may alleviate the situation, gaining emotional support from others, and support to access specialist support organisations. Easing restrictions over Christmas could therefore help to improve a child’s wellbeing by giving them access to a wider range of relatives or family friends from another household and some relief that may be felt within the home. However, in certain circumstances, this may have the opposite effect and expose children to more risk of harm from a wider group.</p> <p>Allowing people to travel to form a Christmas bubble in order to avoid loneliness and isolation will benefit all sections of society, including children and young people.</p>
<b>Age: Older People</b>	<p>Normal public activities, charity dinners and so on that take place on Christmas day will not be possible this year so many more people risk being alone. Crisis, just one charity, operates three centres in Edinburgh alone last year and provided meals to thousands of people across the UK, For example, Age UK in <a href="#">Scotland</a> estimated 100,000 of the country’s 350,000 pensioners ate their festive meal by themselves last year<sup>9</sup> so this number is highly likely to rise.</p> <p>The formation of bubbles of up to three households will provide an opportunity for those older people who wish to spend time with family and friends to do so, with clear benefits for mental health and wellbeing both ways. Those without close family and living alone would also be able to join a bubble as part of an existing extended household. However, for those living alone with no access to family or friends, Christmas could be a time of extreme isolation and loneliness which social care provision should aim to alleviate. Lack of access to the internet or transport would exacerbate this. Social services and third sector organisations should be encouraged to target interventions for those alone at Christmas, reinforced by public information and advertising to encourage neighbourliness.</p> <p>The increased in-home social mixing permitted under the Christmas bubble arrangements also poses a greater risk of catching the virus which, for older people and those more clinically at risk, carries a proportionately higher risk of death<sup>10</sup>. This can be mitigated by strict adherence to FACTS and by strong advice on personal choice and alternative ways of spending Christmas, as well as measures such as keeping houses well-ventilated, although this is unlikely to be beneficial to older people and also penalises those less able to afford the resulting increased fuel bills.</p> <p>Allowing people to travel to form a Christmas bubble in order to avoid loneliness and isolation will benefit all sections of society.</p> <p>However it is also recognised that restrictions on travel may result in limitations on families being able to visit older relatives, thereby resulting in increased loneliness for older family members. The relaxation of these measures to allow travel to form Christmas bubbles will benefit some older people who have been experiencing loneliness and isolation.</p>
<b>Sex: Women</b>	<p>The majority of lone parents and carers are women<sup>11</sup>. Isolation at Christmas is likely to be sharply felt by lone parents and so joining a social bubble would be important</p>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18881114.christmas-scotland-number-elderly-scots-eating-alone-christmas-set-rise-exponentially/>

<sup>10</sup> See [Deaths involving COVID-19 Week 48, 23th - 29th November | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Scottish household survey 2018: annual report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

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	<p>to reduce loneliness. Social bubbles may also provide increased childcare and support for other types of unpaid care which are most often undertaken by women.</p> <p>There is evidence that the lockdown and subsequent restrictions on social interactions is exacerbating experiences of domestic abuse. The easing of restrictions over the festive period may provide a limited opportunity for victims, the majority of whom are women, to seek support from bubble members.</p>
<b>Sex: Men</b>	<p>Positive benefit of additional socialising to individual well-being, including men who are lone parents or carers.</p> <p>However, men are more prone than women to serious illness or death from COVID-19, so increasing socialising over Christmas could increase the risk to men disproportionately more than to women and thereby increase inequality of Harm 1 outcomes for men.</p>
<b>Race</b>	<p>People from minority ethnic groups have a greater risk of the most serious outcomes of contracting the virus. Increasing the transmission risk therefore risks increasing infections among these groups, with disproportionately worse outcomes.</p> <p>Having a numerical as well as a household limit may have a disproportionate impact on those with a larger number of people in each household (ethnic minority communities tend to have a higher proportion of large households). This is mitigated by excluding those aged under 12 from the numerical limit on those participating in a gathering. However, the restrictions may still be a barrier for larger households wishing to meet together. There is a higher likelihood of minority-ethnic communities living in multi-generational families.<sup>12</sup></p> <p>Limited period of easing may however disproportionately affect staff working in the health and care sector where there is a higher proportion of ethnic minority workers.</p> <p>If information is not available in different languages and formats, some people may not understand the measures. It is important that communication and information on the Christmas measures is delivered in a range of different languages and formats other than English</p> <p>For people for whom English is not their first or only language, the ability to take part in social meetings with other people who speak their preferred language will be helpful for sharing knowledge and getting emotional and practical support, as well as for promoting understanding of the rules and guidance. This will be further mitigated by translating the guidance into a number of languages, as was done for the Levels Approach.</p> <p>There is some evidence at UK level <sup>13</sup> to suggest a high prevalence of mental health issues amongst minority ethnic communities so these levels will still provide opportunities for individuals to connect with family socially, alleviating the impact of restrictions for people suffering a range of mental health issues, including anxiety and depression.</p>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/inequalities-by-ethnicity-in-the-context-of-covid-19-slide-pack/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/health/mental-health/adults-using-nhs-funded-mental-health-and-learning-disability-services/latest#:~:text=Ethnic%20group%20is%20a%20required%20piece%20of%20information,including%20independent%20sector%20providers%2C%20to%20submit%20MHSDS%20data.>



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<p><b>Religion or Belief</b></p>	<p>We have continued to allow all places of worship to remain open as part of the Strategic Framework (Levels 0-3 at a maximum capacity of 50, reducing to 20 at Level 4). This applies to all faiths. Furthermore, bubbles can worship together in their own homes subject to the extant guidance.</p> <p>However, there may be concern amongst faith communities that we have permitted bubbles to worship together over Christmas, but not for other religious festivals such as Diwali or Hanukah. The approach taken to allow holiday gatherings was developed as part of a UK-wide approach. The public facing guidance on festive gatherings makes clear that the safest way to spend Christmas and the festive period is to stay within your own household, in your own home and your own local area, and that households are not encouraged to from holiday gatherings.</p> <p>The ability to form holiday gatherings applies to all regardless of faith. This is supported by clear and inclusive communications and guidance that focuses on the Christmas period more as a national bank holiday when schools/businesses often close than a specifically Christian festival.</p> <p>There will be a positive impact for people of the Christian religion who celebrate Christmas as a religious festival of being able to celebrate with more family members than would have been the case if easing of the restrictions had not been agreed to.</p>
<p><b>Disability</b></p>	<p>Loneliness was more prevalent among disabled people prior to the pandemic and for many disabled people this has been exacerbated during the pandemic, so being able to meet up with friends and family at these lower levels might have particularly positive impacts. In 2018, a higher percentage of disabled adults in Scotland (39%) said that they felt lonely some, most, or all of the time in the preceding week compared with all adults (21%) and non-disabled adults (16%).</p> <p>Disabled people may be more likely to be unable to leave their house, or feel more comfortable inside (especially if their home has adaptations or specialist mobility equipment) and therefore may particularly benefit from being able to have visitors at home.</p> <p>Those with health conditions might feel anxious about allowing people into their homes due to the increased risk of infection but may perhaps feel pressure to do so, or may not be given the option if visitors or other household members make the decision. Measures around meeting up with others could lead to an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. This would disproportionately affect some disabled people due to the increased risks associated with COVID-19.</p> <p>Without information in accessible formats, information may not be understood or be more difficult to understand. It will be important for information about the easements to be communicated in a wide range of formats.</p> <p>If there is high demand for public transport then this could have a knock on impact for people requiring access to disabled facilities, particularly if they do not have access to private transport.</p>
<p><b>Sexual Orientation</b></p>	<p>The opportunity to mix with a wider range of people may be a positive benefit for people from the LGBT community who have lacked access to peer support this year.</p>

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<b>Marriage and Civil Partnership</b>	No evidence of a differential impact identified at this time.
<b>Pregnancy and Maternity</b>	People who are pregnant don't appear to be more susceptible to coronavirus (COVID-19) than the general population, but are generally more susceptible to infection. <sup>14</sup>
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>	The opportunity to mix with a wider range of people may be a positive benefit for people from the transgender community who have lacked access to peer support this year.
<b>Socio-economic disadvantage</b>	<p>Risks that easing travel restrictions for a short period may increase travel costs, may be mitigated by working with the public transport industry to ensure provision as far as possible. Also some consideration has been given to those who may be unable to host large groups at home by enabling people to stay in nearby accommodation (recognising however that people in lower socioeconomic groups may not be able to afford to pay for holiday accommodation).</p> <p>Having a fixed window from 23-27 December may disadvantage those who are shift workers or rostered to work over the period, with no dispensation to visit family or friends at another time. Sectors affected include health and social care, local authority and utilities, retail, hospitality, offshore, emergency services and armed forces.</p> <p>Allowing people to travel to form a Christmas bubble in order to avoid loneliness and isolation will benefit all sections of society. Social distancing requirements and other adjustments due to COVID-19 have resulted in reduced capacity across the public transport network. This may result in individuals who are reliant on public transport being unable to access travel options over the period 23-27 December.</p>

### Mitigating actions:

The policy on holiday gatherings is supported by communications through a range of media, including broadcast and social media. This ensures that the widest range of people are aware of the policy and the details of the advice provided. Public guidance has been provided which stresses that the Scottish Government's advice is that wherever possible people should keep in touch with friends and family members from other households through technology - or, if they decide to meet in person, they should minimise the numbers and duration, and if possible meet out of doors. This guidance also makes suggestions on hygiene measures when meeting other households, and additional advice for higher risk groups on how to meet other households. This is intended to help reduce the increased risks of transmission of Covid within holiday gatherings.

Transport Scotland is engaging with operators across all modes to understand demand for and availability of Transport provision. This includes a particular focus on ferry services. The guidance which is published for the public to help them understand the travel measures sets out information of use and relevance to the Scottish islands, for example highlighting that in cases which may involve overnight travel (for example, with Shetland), the journey should be started on the 27<sup>th</sup>. It is also acknowledged that a person may be delayed as a result of travel disruption.

### Monitoring and Review

- All the measures relating to festive gatherings contained in these Regulations are time-limited and will expire on 27 December 2020.

<sup>14</sup> [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Pregnancy and newborn babies | NHS inform](#)