

Media Release

Date: 29 January 2021

Open Letter to the Bailiwick of Guernsey: Week one of Lockdown

Dear Islanders,

Tomorrow will mark one week since, for the second time in a year, all of our lives very suddenly turned upside down as we swiftly entered lockdown in response to community seeding of the coronavirus being identified locally.

We've known since we exited the last lockdown that this was always a possibility, the risk presented by COVID-19 did not go away. We know also that in having been through this once before, we can do it again. We have significant advantages this time, an expanded on-island testing programme is in place with a highly experienced team running it. Our community understands what to do when we ask them to 'Stay at Home', how that helps our pandemic response, and also how to cope while in lockdown, though that's not to say it's easy.

But this is by no means simply a re-run of our previous lockdown. While we have more experience, more equipment and more capability, we are facing different challenges. We're seeing more cases amongst young people, impacting families, employers, a number of schools and many others. We're needing to contact some specific larger groups who will have been at an event together and ask them to do the right thing and self-isolate. Our strategy is evolving into three tiers, lockdown, self-isolate and test. That's because our aim this time is to make this as short a lockdown as possible.

But all of that means our community is feeling the effects of this lockdown differently. The pressure on many parents is enormous with our schools still closed even to vulnerable students and children of essential workers. Schools have issued guidance on distance learning, but my message to parents is this: do what you can, and thank you for what you're doing. No one expects you to be teachers, as well as parents as well as trying to still work or cope with the other pressures of lockdown.

We are working hard to reopen those schools to those specific groups of children as quickly as possible, while making sure it's safe to do so. That will likely involve using our ports testing facilities in a different way to increase the speed with which we can schedule tests

and collect swabs – again, we’re responding to different sorts of challenges in this second lockdown, but we have more options in how we deal with them.

Our case numbers continue to rise but encouragingly it is not an exponential increase and a higher proportion of them are identified through contact tracing. Our Public Health team are linking more and more cases together, building a clearer picture of the spread and getting it under control.

Our statistics for those Islanders who have received the vaccine are rising too. Our Community Vaccination Centre, set up at a location chosen so that we would be able to respond to exactly this situation, is continuing uninterrupted despite having to apply social distancing, additional PPE and other precautions. By the start of this week we’d administered nearly 7,000 doses and already that figure will be far higher.

There are positive signs but we cannot be complacent, there is a lot of work to do to get on top of this virus, and return us to the excellent position we were in just one week ago. We know this pandemic can throw up all sorts of unexpected challenges, but I still believe that we can achieve our aim of a short, sharp lockdown and that we will soon be with each other again.

Deputy Peter Ferbrache,

Chair of the Civil Contingencies Authority

Ends