

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

FRAMEWORK FOR A SAFE EXIT FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1 OUR PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGY

The Government of Jersey is pursuing a **delay, contain and shield** strategy to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary goal of the public health strategy is to flatten the epidemic curve.

To date, the following public health measures have been introduced, rapidly, with the aim of suppressing the spread of the virus, providing time to make preparations across the health service, and to protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19 across the Island:

Aim	Measures in place now
Delay & suppress the spread	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stay at Home Instruction (to achieve strict social distancing) 2. School closures
Contain and control the spread	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Household isolation for confirmed cases 2. Self isolation for people who've been in contact with confirmed cases 3. In-bound travellers must isolate for 14 days 4. Testing and contact tracing
Shield the most vulnerable	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extremely vulnerable (high risk medical conditions) instructed to home isolate 2. Vulnerable (over 65 / underlying medical conditions): Stay at Home instruction emphasised

We recognise that while the public health measures above are required to combat COVID-19, they must not extend any longer than absolutely necessary.

The second goal of this strategy is therefore to exit the pandemic as quickly as we can safely do. This framework sets out how we propose to achieve this goal, with as little risk of needing to return to more restrictive levels as possible.

2 WHERE WE ARE NOW

Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 1 of 9

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

Following the decision to close schools, and the announcement of the Stay at Home Instruction on 30th March, Jersey has been in lockdown – a severe state entered because there was a high risk that COVID-19 was not contained.

The lockdown measures introduced in Jersey have been less extreme than in some other jurisdictions, but they have significantly impacted our daily lives, education and businesses. Together, by following the Stay at Home guidance, we have successfully suppressed the spread of COVID-19, and created vital time for health and care services to prepare.

Monitoring our public health data indicates that we may soon be able to begin the careful process of relaxing the lockdown measures currently in place: right now, we have a low level of new cases. However, it is also likely that the majority of people in Jersey have not yet had COVID-19.

So as we begin to relax lockdown measures, this will mean more people will come into contact with others outside their households. Infection rates will rise steadily, more people will contract COVID-19, and some of those will need acute hospital care.

This is why we must take a phased, gradual approach to lifting lockdown restrictions. A vaccine will not be available for possibly more than a year, and we cannot stay locked down indefinitely.

So, we will ease the lockdown by progressing through three careful and controlled levels, that will over time enable us to return to more normal ways of living and working. These are set out in the next section.

Progress through the levels of the framework will be informed by medical advice on minimising harm, balancing suppression of the virus with Islanders' wider wellbeing, whilst ensuring that we continue to have enough healthcare capacity. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) will advise Ministers on when we are ready to enter each level of the exit framework.

There is an ongoing risk that the virus spreads too quickly. If this happens, we may need to pause at the level we are in at the time, or even tighten some measures back up, depending on the seriousness of the situation.

Our response to this pandemic has been and will continue to be informed by rapid scientific learning and evolving advice from the World Health Organisation, Centres for Disease Control and Public Health England. The evidence that the STAC will draw upon when preparing advice to Ministers is set out in section 6.

Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 2 of 9

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

Government will continue to take decisions based upon medical advice on minimising harms and considering the sustainable health, social, economic and environmental wellbeing of islanders.

3 KEY LEVELS OF THE EXIT FRAMEWORK

Today we are at level 4 in our response: lockdown. Our aim is to progress step-wise from level 4, to 3, 2, and then 1, as shown in diagram (i) below. During each level, the lockdown measures will be eased.



Diagram (i): The safe exit framework: relaxing restrictions carefully over 3 stages, from lockdown

We will move as fast as we can, because we want to alleviate the very real harms the lockdown measures are causing and we want families, communities and businesses to begin the journey back to as much of a normal life as soon as possible.

But our progress through the exit framework must be balanced and conditional, in order to avoid overloading our health and care services. When we move down a level, and when changes take place within each level, will depend on how quickly and how far our monitoring tells us COVID-19 is spreading across Jersey, and how much pressure key health and care services are under.

The detailed safe exit framework table is provided in parallel. The framework table sets out the public health measures that need to be in place during each level.

Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 3 of 9

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

Overall, Islanders will experience progressively more freedom of movement at levels 3, 2 and then 1. Businesses and employers will be asked to operate according to strict public health guidelines as they open up premises, many in a staged way.

Drawing upon international evidence, the guiding principles underpinning the measures and levels in the safe exit framework are:

- Where an activity can happen or business can open in a way that minimizes the risk of spreading COVID-19, it should be able to do so as soon as possible
- Changes must be easy to understand and relatively easy to implement, with guidelines issued where appropriate
- The purpose of a phased and gradual progression through the levels of the framework is to calibrate the overall increase of social contact. Wherever possible the levels should introduce changes that are fair. Some unequal experiences are however inevitable
- The likelihood of transmitting COVID-19 is much lower outside, and increases when you spend longer periods of time in proximity to others, especially inside. Indoor spaces especially should therefore be opened up in stages
- It is sensible to avoid unnecessary risks – for example, wherever working from home is possible, people should keep doing it
- Services and premises that require or risk close personal contact have a significantly higher risk of spreading the disease and therefore should open at a different stage to other changes that will trigger large increases in social contact
- Large gatherings carry significant risk and should be avoided
- Physical distancing and good hygiene are fundamental and should be maintained through every stage; behavioural prompts to follow simple public health advice (cloth masks, hand washing) should be encouraged throughout every level.

The measures in the framework may be updated based on new scientific knowledge about COVID-19, information about the effectiveness of control measures in Jersey and overseas, or the direction of travel (for example, the application may be different if there is a surge of cases and Jersey needs to tighten up a level rather than move through to the next).

A detailed operational plan for the phased and gradual resumption of non-COVID-19 health services will also be developed.

4 SHIELDING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Easing the general lockdown measures across levels 3, 2 and 1, will benefit many people and businesses across Jersey.

There are however people in our community, adults and children, who have health conditions that put them at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

These people are extremely vulnerable to the virus. During the lockdown period, the Government has strongly advised the extremely vulnerable to avoid as much social contact

Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 4 of 9

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

as they can, and not leave home at all. This advice remains for now, and shielding at home continues to be encouraged.

Yet COVID-19 will be with us for many months, and people's wellbeing is likely to deteriorate if they feel imprisoned in their homes for too long. The health service will work to provide those extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 with the right information and support, to enable them to make the right choices for themselves about how to cope, and how to live, as the pandemic progresses.

Similarly, people who are vulnerable to illness from COVID-19 are encouraged to be particularly careful. During the Stay at Home period, those with certain medical conditions and people over 65 have been encouraged to stay at home whenever possible and to be strict with themselves about limiting time away from home, again to minimise contact.

Further guidelines will be provided to help those vulnerable to COVID-19 take informed choices during the course of the pandemic.

For the current shielding guidelines, please see the gov.je website.

Many people across Jersey have also volunteered to provide help of all forms since the start of the pandemic. People who are vulnerable to the virus and shielding at home are particularly encouraged to take advantage of the support on offer: whether that's someone to help with the shopping, physical or mental health support, or just a chat. See gov.je, or contact your Parish Hall or 'Connect Me' at any time.

5 CONTAINING OUTBREAKS OF THE VIRUS WHEN THEY ARISE

As social contact increases, we need to control the rate at which COVID-19 spreads. We have used the valuable time afforded by the lockdown measures to prepare the health and care system, and to increase our capacity to contain the spread of the COVID-19 when cases arise.

In line with international best practice, our approach focuses on:

- Testing, contact tracing and isolating confirmed and suspected cases of COVID-19
- Preventing individual cases becoming clusters – particularly in institutional settings such as care homes, and
- Responding quickly to stop any early clusters from becoming outbreaks.

Our **Island wide testing programme** uses a range of testing methods and is ready to be scaled up and down, as needed.

The diagnostic testing programme is being expanded to enable the health service to do an average of 500 PCR tests a day, using laboratories on and off Island. This will enable us to

Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 5 of 9

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

test more suspected cases in the community and to proactively screen key essential workers.

The prevalence of COVID-19 in the community will be assessed through a series of studies, using antibody tests. These will provide valuable insights into how far COVID-19 has spread now, and over time. And as scientific understanding of immunity to COVID-19 develops, we will introduce laboratory-based blood testing to assess antibody presence.

Contact tracing for all confirmed cases has been in place since the start of the epidemic in Jersey. More contact tracers are now trained up, and the team will scale as needed in order to track those exposed to COVID-19.

We also are exploring the role that digital technology (apps) might play to help contact tracing. If an app is found that could work for Jersey, the decision to use it will be made transparently, and it will only be used if privacy can be protected.

As the number of people with COVID-19 increases, people who have it or are suspected of having it must isolate themselves from others to limit its spread. New and clear guidance about when, how and why to isolate will be published before we begin our safe exit process. To protect public health, the Government is also able to enforce quarantine. These powers will only be used as a last resort.

The Government's pandemic business continuity plans and response capability will remain on standby throughout our exit journey.

6 PROGRESS ON THIS FRAMEWORK WILL BE GUIDED BY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVICE

Progress through the safe exit framework will be informed by medical advice on minimising harm.

The Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) comprises the principal medical advisors, including Jersey's Medical Director, Medical Officer for Health and expert Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, along with leading data analysts, strategists and advisors in communicable diseases and epidemiology. The STAC will carefully consider the evidence throughout the pandemic to minimise harms and seek to ensure a safe exit.

The STAC's advice will draw upon the following evidence:

Epidemiological evidence being monitored includes:

Actual data at all stages of the virus: start of infection, onset of symptoms, hospitalisations, ICU, mortality, recovery.

Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 6 of 9

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

Prevalence of the virus in the community will be monitored via the household health survey, longitudinal antibody study, and triangulated with informal data (for example, reports of symptoms to the helpdesk)

Emerging clinical research on COVID-19

Public Health England, Centres for Disease Control and World Health Organisation guidance, as well as the exit strategies of other countries and how well they are going in practice

System capacity evidence being monitored includes:

- Public health campaign effectiveness and readiness to support next level
- Wellbeing support in place and readiness to support next level, with priority for people being shielded
- Testing capacity and utilisation
- Contact tracing team capacity and utilisation
- Hospital bed and ICU capacity – current and projected
- Health care staff availability
- PPE, ventilator, oxygen and other health material availability – current and projected
- Funeral capacity – current and projected

Insights from these sources will be balanced against equally important evidence on the unintended harmful impacts of the public health measures put into place to delay, contain and shield people from COVID-19:

Evidence on harmful impacts of COVID-19 measures under review:

Health impacts: review of impacts on patient behaviours, diagnostic interventions, waiting lists for specialist reviews and intervention, cancer and tertiary pathways; referral rates and delays in mental health services; impacts of reduced access to therapy services; psychological wellbeing impacts especially amongst patients with learning difficulties. (Quantitative and qualitative inputs).

Social and cultural impacts: ongoing monitoring of the different effects and experiences of COVID-19 via review of independent social surveys in Jersey and the Channel Islands; insight from front-line services in public and charitable sectors (police, drug and alcohol and abuse support services, homelessness support, and others); ongoing monitoring of wider evidence emerging from the UK and Europe

Economic impacts: weekly data on unemployment figures, businesses closed or opened, uptake of payroll support, business loans, income support; ongoing analysis by the Chief Economist and team

Environmental impacts: review being undertaken as lower priority as environmental impacts judged to be both positive (better air quality due to reduced use of vehicles) as well as negative (single-use equipment waste).

7 WHEN WILL EACH LEVEL HAPPEN?

Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 7 of 9

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

In advance, it is impossible to be certain about exactly how COVID-19 will spread in any country. Providing firm dates for when each level in the safe exit framework will be reached weeks in advance could prove misleading.

But we do want to reduce uncertainty as much we can. This framework provides a clear plan of the levels we have yet to go through. The key indicators that will signal Jersey is ready to move safely *down* through one level into the next are:

- Evidence that the number of new cases is only rising gradually, is steady or declining
- Evidence that there is sufficient health system capacity for the next 14-28 days.

When Ministers take the decision that the conditions are appropriate for Jersey to move through the next level of the framework, having received advice from the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), the Government will announce the date as far in advance as possible. We will also work with industry and community organisations to help them prepare.

The key indicator that will show that the virus is spreading too quickly, meaning we may need to reduce social contact by re-tightening public health measures, is the speed of increase of new cases (the ‘doubling rate’). This is a scenario we are working hard to avoid, but the STAC and the Government remain vigilant and prepared to act swiftly should it arise.

8 TAKING THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER

Exiting safely from COVID-19 is likely to be a journey that takes a number of months. And we will progress more safely towards exit if we continue to work together.

COVID-19 is spread via social contact. As we progress through the exit framework, more social contact will be possible but we won’t immediately be returning to ‘normal life’. A phased and gradual approach to increasing social contact is critical to helping us manage infection rates and to avoid overwhelming the hospital.

Please listen out for, and follow, public health guidance at all times. Alongside the instruction to *Stay at Home* which remains in force, core public health guidance is currently:

- Keep 2 metres apart from anyone outside your immediate household.
- Wash your hands for 20 seconds regularly throughout the day.
- Catch your cough or sneeze in a tissue, bin it and wash your hands. If you don’t have a tissue, cough into your elbow and avoid touching your face.
- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces.

Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 8 of 9

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

Cloth masks are advised, especially in enclosed public spaces such as shops (for staff and customers).

If you have flu-like symptoms, stay or go home immediately and call the Helpline on 445566.

In due course, as more business activity is permitted, Government will also ask businesses and other employers to apply tailored public health guidelines to protect their staff and their customers. We will work with industry groups and trades unions to assist businesses and staff to make preparations before each level of the framework is triggered.

Government will also publish all key monitoring data regularly and rapidly, so that both progress along the framework, and obstacles, are transparent and widely understood.

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Date	Status	Document Name	Version	Page
05.01.20	Official – Sensitive	Framework for a Safe Exit	1.0 approved	Page 9 of 9