

NI Executive Office Updates 24th March- COVID-19

The Executive Office held a further press conference on the evening of the 24th March. Both Arlene Foster and Michelle O'Neill reiterated the importance of the restrictive measures put in place and highlighted that such restrictions are expected to last more than three weeks.

Following on from the Prime Minister's address to the nation on Monday 23rd March, the Executive is currently drawing up guidance on which businesses and employment are to be categorised as essential in order to align with UK policy. This will be shared once published.

Please see below for a summary of updates from 24th March:

Health

- A fifth person in Northern Ireland has died, the total number of confirmed cases now stands at 172
- The number of tests conducted in Northern Ireland will be increased to 900 per day by next week
- The Executive has set up an information webpage for the pandemic
- The Royal College of Nursing has written to the First and Deputy First Ministers asking them to personally intervene in ensuring the sufficient supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for nursing staff.

Business

- In alignment with the Prime Minister's statement on Monday 23rd March, the Executive are to publish a list of essential businesses which must remain open, they will include: Retailers from Corner Shops and Supermarkets, Credit Unions, Post Offices, Pharmacies and Takeaway Food Outlets
- All non-essential businesses must close including hairdressers, salons, and gyms.
- No business can be evicted from their premises if they miss a payment in the next three months due to Coronavirus
- The contactless spending limit has been increased from £30 to £45 to reduce contact in shops
- Ryanair will ground almost all flights bar essential services
- Manufacturing and construction firms can continue to operate so long as social distancing adhered to, however, this is under review to determine which companies are essential operators
- There is yet to be an adequate support package offered to the self-employed



- The Finance Minister has directed the department to make prompt payments to contractors so that wages are paid and jobs maintained

Construction

- The Construction Employers Federation (CEF) has called for all non-essential construction work to stop
- A review will take place to determine what construction work is viewed as essential and non-essential

Infrastructure

- All MOT centres in Northern Ireland have now been closed
- Parking enforcement and charges have been suspended

The Assembly

- The Assembly will be reduced to one sitting per week with reduced numbers and plans are being drawn for committees to operate remotely
- Emergency laws passed in the Assembly today will allow police to legally enforce social distancing

Other Updates

- Minister for DAERA Edwin Poots has closed all forest parks in Northern Ireland
- The Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey has introduced an emergency support payment for the most vulnerable who are in isolation

