

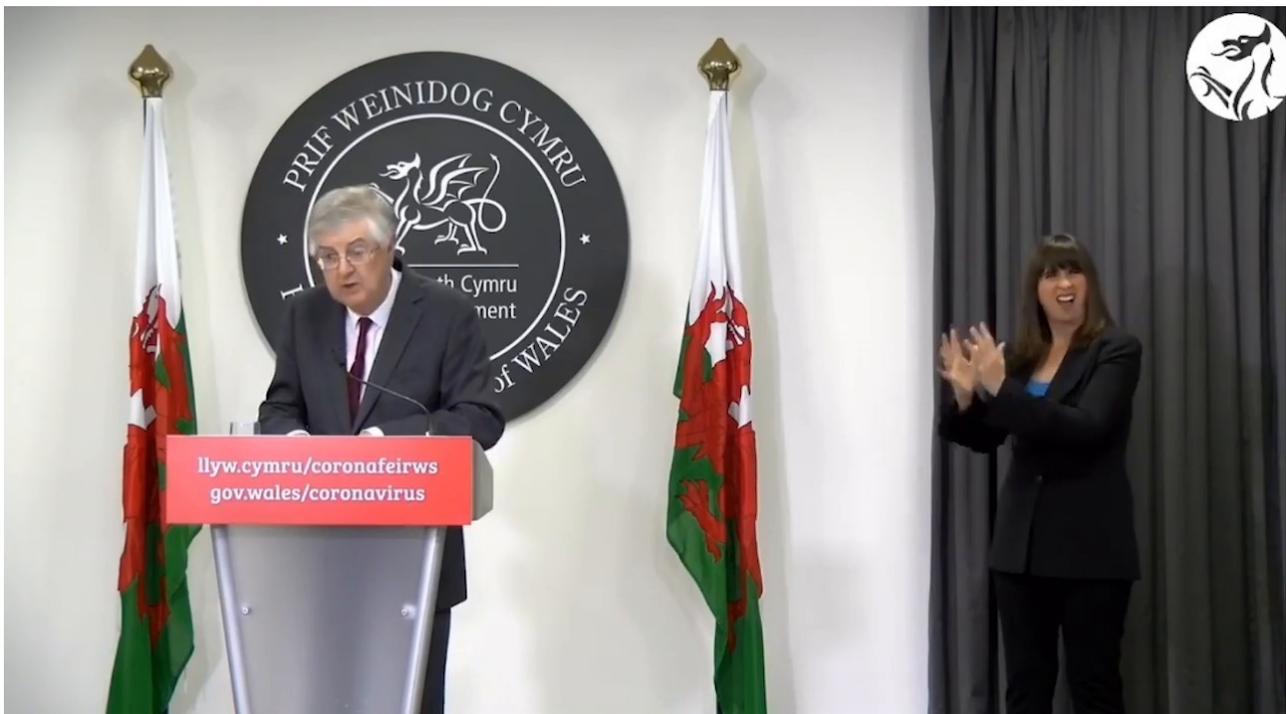
Wales' First Minister Mark Drakeford says people will have to stay home again in 'fire break' lockdown - live updates

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October 16, 2020

Mark Drakeford is due to take Friday's Welsh Government briefing as the Wales travel ban is set to begin

Businesses to shut and people confined to homes in Wales 'fire break'



Video Loading

First Minister Mark Drakeford has revealed details of Wales' plan for a "fire break" lockdown to halt the increasing spread of coronavirus in Wales.

Speaking at Wales' lunchtime briefing on Friday, October 16, Mr Drakeford said no final decision had been taken but gave details of "fire break" set of lockdown restrictions he is considering.

He said that the Welsh Government's plan would see people confined to their homes and businesses shutting for two or three weeks to give the virus a "short, sharp shock".

It is expected that if ministers decide to go ahead with it, this could be announced on Monday next week, October 19, and come into force on Friday, October 23.

Mr Drakeford also said there would be new national restrictions after the lockdown to take us up until Christmas.

"This would be a short, sharp shock to the virus, which could turn back the clock, slowing down its spread and buy us more time – and vital capacity in the NHS.

"A “fire-break” would also mean a short, sharp shock to all our lives – it would mean shutting down businesses and the economy.

"We would all have to stay at home to once again save lives. But this time it would be for weeks not months.

"We're considering a two or three-week “fire-break”. The shorter the period, the sharper the measures will have to be.

Mark Drakeford says Welsh government will 'do everything they can' to keep schools open:



Click to play

Welsh government will 'do everything they can' to **keep schools open** during 'fire break' lockdown

"A successful fire-break would re-set the virus at a lower level. Together with a new national set of rules for the whole of Wales after the fire-break period we would have slowed the virus down enough to get us through to Christmas."

A spokesman for the Welsh Government said that the measures being considered in Wales were based on advice from both the UK Government's advisory body Sage and Wales' own Technical Advisory Group of scientists.

Survey: Do you think Wales should ban travel from Covid hotspots in other parts of the UK

It comes as the [proposed ban on people entering Wales from UK coronavirus hotspots](#) is due to begin on Friday at 6pm.

But Welsh Secretary Simon Hart has warned that the ban "risks stirring division and confusion", and has asked for clarification about the restrictions.

Mr Drakeford also said he was "baffled" by Boris Johnson's reluctance to impose UK-wide travel restrictions, saying that had the Prime Minister supported the measure, it would have reinforced "the sense of acting together across the United Kingdom".

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Live updates:

14:13

Education update as keeping schools open is 'priority'

Education Minister Kirsty Williams has issued an updated after the briefing today.

She said: "There will be an opportunity to sit core GCSEs in English Language, Mathematics, Mathematics-Numeracy and Welsh Language in November 2020 as planned. Other qualifications will be available in January 2021 and as part of the summer 2021 series

"This is so that those learners due to take GCSEs will be able to continue with their education with the minimum possible disruption, under the circumstances

"As the First Minister said today, keeping schools open is a top priority for the Welsh Government and we'll do everything we can to maximise education and minimise disruption.

"However, we face some incredibly difficult decisions to bring the virus under control - ministers will meet over the weekend to discuss a fire-break. The FM will report the outcome directly to you.

"As always, I will update you about matters involving education. Please share to help make others aware and, please, think twice before sharing information from other sources. Diolch yn fawr."

13:26

Map showing dramatic rise in coronavirus

Here is the heat map that was shown at the briefing.

It shows how quickly coronavirus has spread in Wales since August.

13:04

'Circuit-breaker' is not the only option

Mr Drakeford said the circuit breaker was not the only option that they have, but it was the one that had been recommended.

He said alternatives would be increasing restrictions in local lockdown areas or advice nationally to try and curb the virus.

13:01

'Firebreak' would replicate national lockdown

Mr Drakeford said the firebreak lockdown won't be exactly the same as the national lockdown in March, but it will replicate it.

Essential travel would still be allowed, but he said it would not be "helpful" to give more details until discussions are held over the weekend.

"We are actively considering this as one of the things we can do to turn back the tide on the virus," he said.

The situation "won't be identical because there are other things we have to think of" seven months on, Mr Drakeford added.

He said people would find a circuit-breaker situation "pretty familiar" to what they faced before, although the lockdown earlier in the year was "of course far longer".

12:57

First Minister has written to Chancellor

Mark Drakeford said he has asked Rishi Sunak for UK-wide business support to be aligned with a fire-break lockdown.

As part of the discussion on a new 'firebreak lockdown' Welsh ministers have been looking at plans for a new business support package before deciding whether to press ahead.

The Welsh Government has already announced £140m in businesses support in the latest phase of its economic recovery plan.

But Mark Drakeford said he would need to go "above and beyond that" if a fire-break went ahead.

12:41

Keeping schools open is 'top priority'

Mark Drakeford said that keeping schools open was a “top priority”.

He admitted that schools had been discussed during the meetings about the firebreaker lockdown, but did not rule out closing them for a short period of time.

It is thought that a lockdown would be announced around the half term holiday which begins in the majority of areas in Wales next Friday.

He said: “We will do everything we can to keep schools open.

“Whether we are able to do that entirely is still a matter for the detail of the discussion that goes on.

“But as a priority I reaffirm that for everybody today.”

12:31

'Short, sharp shock' to bring virus under control

Mr Drakeford ended his briefing by saying Welsh Government was looking very closely at introducing a time-limited “fire break”.

He described it as a “short, sharp shock to the virus” which could “turn back the clock, slowing down its spread and buy us more time – and vital capacity in the NHS.”

The First Minister said a “fire-break” would also mean a “short, sharp shock to all our lives”, but that it would be for weeks and not months.

Mr Drakeford added: “We’re considering a two or three-week “fire-break”. The shorter the period, the sharper the measures will have to be.

“A successful fire-break would re-set the virus at a lower level. Together with a new national set of rules for the whole of Wales after the fire-break period we would have slowed the virus down enough to get us through to Christmas.

“These are incredibly difficult decisions and we have not yet come to a final conclusion about whether we will have a “fire-break”.”

Ministers are set to meet through the weekend to discuss the break further and the decision will be reported on Monday.

“Doing nothing is not an option,” he said.

12:23

Sharp rise in hospital admissions

The First Minister highlighted the number of people being admitted to hospital and how it has risen in the past week.

Last week there were **500** people in hospital; earlier this week there were **700**. Yesterday (Thursday) there were **825**, and critical units in Wales are “full”.

Mr Drakeford said: “This week, there has been a marked increase in the number of deaths reported by Public Health Wales.

“Behind every number is a person and a grieving family. I want them to know I am thinking of you all.

“Our NHS has done a fantastic job caring for people with coronavirus but this has come at a cost – a cost to normal services and a real cost in the demands places on our front line staff in health and social care. Now we will have to ask them to do yet more.

“ Once again, our hospital beds are filling with people with coronavirus symptoms.

“ And once again, we are asking NHS staff, who have already done so much, to do more.

“ Because, hard as we have all been working together to slow down the spread of the virus, it is now moving faster than the measures we have put in place locally and nationally.

“Unless we are able to get coronavirus back under control, there is a real risk the NHS will be overwhelmed.”

12:21

The R number has increased

Mr Drakeford said that the incidence rate for Wales is now higher than 100 cases per 100,000 people. and the R number for Wales is 1.4.

“These figures mean about 2,500 people are being infected every day,” he said. “And the rise in that number is getting faster every week.

“At the current rate of growth, we will pass the March peak by the end of this month.

“Now, I want to be clear that these figures would have been much higher if we hadn’t acted early and quickly to put local and national measures in place.

“ Thanks to everything you have done, we are still in a better place in Wales than any other part of the United Kingdom.”

12:19

Coronavirus has 'truly woken up' for winter

The First Minister has opened his briefing with a warning that coronavirus has “truly woken up” for winter.

He showed a video of how fast it has spread in just six weeks and said: “In just a few short weeks coronavirus has spread to every part of Wales and is circulating widely. Like many other countries across Europe and the UK, we are facing a very serious situation.

“At the end of **August**, there was hardly any coronavirus in Wales – just a few cases in Wrexham and South Wales.

“As **September** starts, you can see cases beginning to spread in South Wales and some clusters in Mid Wales.

“As the month goes on, the virus spreads in the South Wales Valleys – the lighter the colour the more cases.

“Coronavirus quickly spreads across South Wales, with more and more people testing positive.

“As **September** ends, we see cases moving across North Wales.

“By the beginning of **October**, we have cases in every part of our country.”

12:07

First Minister's briefing

First Minister Mark Drakeford is going to be heading up the Welsh Government briefing in under 10 minutes.

He will be speaking from Cathays Park at 12.15pm with the latest update on the situation in Wales.

11:44

BMA welcome travel ban and potential circuit-breaker

Dr David Bailey, British Medical Association (BMA) Cymru Wales council chair, said he welcomed the travel ban as well as discussions about a potential circuit-breaker.

He said: “Cases are climbing fast across Wales with the latest figures showing that the number of Covid-related patients in the Welsh NHS has risen by 49% in a week, it’s clear that the current restrictions are not strong enough to suppress the spread of the virus.

“We welcome the move to introduce a travel ban from Covid hotspots, but at this critical point doctors in Wales support, and are calling for as a matter of urgency, a circuit-breaker lockdown for a number of weeks.

“It is imperative that robust action is taken now without delay to protect the citizens of Wales and the Welsh NHS.”

Dr Bailey added: “A second peak alongside the added pressure that the winter season will inevitably bring and the huge backlog of patients already in the system is quite frankly an overwhelming prospect. Our members are deeply concerned about the ability of the service to cope.”

11:32

Lancashire to move into Tier 3

Lancashire will go into Tier 3 of lockdown restrictions after a deal was hammered out with the Government, sources have confirmed to the Press Association.

Though some local leaders in the county were “reluctant” to agree to further restrictions, the deal is expected to be announced shortly by Number 10.

Local councils had been promised £12 million in funding but had also agreed an extra £30 million to help with the local test, trace and isolate and other measures, sources said.

11:17

'There will be support and time to prepare' - Wales' counsel general

Wales' counsel general Jeremy Miles has said the country could face “serious restrictions” in the coming days in an effort to curb the resurgence of coronavirus.

Mr Miles said a decision on introducing a potential circuit-breaker lockdown has still not been made, but was one of the options the Welsh Government was currently discussing with local authorities and trade unions.

He told the PA news agency: “Further restrictions are going to be required. There have obviously been discussions within the Government about whether a circuit-breaker is the right response to that.

“There's been planning around a range of scenarios, and we've been talking to our partners in local government and elsewhere about various options to get their perspectives on that as well.”

He added: “There's a range of ways of doing those things, if they are done. And some of them involve quite serious restrictions.”

Mr Miles said any announcement, expected next week, would come alongside “support and time to prepare”.

He said no decision had been made on the length of time any restrictions would last.

10:19

Schools planning for 'circuit breaker'

Schools are making contingency plans to return to remote learning for all pupils in case they are ordered to shut for a “circuit breaker” lockdown in Wales.

The Association of School and College Leaders Cymru said headteachers are aware a “circuit breaker” to help slow the spread of coronavirus is possible around half term which starts on October 26.

09:29

UEFA set to axe host cities for Euros

UEFA chiefs are ready to rip up their plans for next summer’s Euros in a decision that would have a direct bearing upon Wales, according to reports.

The Sun say bosses accept the tournament cannot go ahead with the planned 12 host cities and UEFA are ready to drop some venues.

One of the first to go, the paper claims, will be Baku in Azerbaijan. That is where Ryan Giggs’ side are due to meet Switzerland and Turkey, before a Rome clash with Italy.

09:01

Wetherspoon sinks to first loss in 36 years over Covid-19

Pub chain JD Wetherspoon has sunk to a loss of £105.4 million after sales took a £556 million hit from the Covid-19 crisis.

The company said it saw an increase in business in the weeks following the easing of lockdown but the new restrictions and 10pm curfew have seen this fall back.

One-off costs due to Covid-19 hit £29 million, including £5.9 million in drinks and food that had to be thrown away, £6.2 million on PPE, screens and other equipment to make pubs Covid- secure, and £17.1 million on staff costs.

(Image: Henry Nicholls/PA Wire)

08:58

Travellers from Italy now have to self-isolate

People entering Wales from Italy, Vatican City, San Marino and Crete will now have to

self-isolate upon arrival, the health minister has confirmed.

The locations have been removed from the list of exempt countries and territories which means that anybody entering Wales from any of these areas will have to self-isolate for 14 days.

The rules will come into force at 4am on Saturday, October 17.

08:01

Cardiff now has highest infection rate in Wales

Ten more people have died in Wales after testing positive for coronavirus and Cardiff has become the area with the highest infection rate in Wales.

Latest figures from Public Health Wales (PHW) for Thursday, October 15, show that Wales' capital has recorded another 190 cases in the last 24 hours - more than twice as many as any other council area in Wales.

In total, across Wales, the NHS body confirmed that 727 new positive cases have been diagnosed following a lab test, a drop on the record-breaking 946 seen on Wednesday.

It means that **Cardiff** now has 223.5 cases per 100,000 people based on a rolling seven-day average, up from 198.1 on Wednesday.

Merthyr Tydfil now has the second highest rate at **198.1** cases per 100,000, a drop on 227.1 the day before, with **Wrexham** third with **192.7** per 100,000 population (up on 186.1).

The other local authority areas recording more than 100 cases per 100,000 included Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) with 178.2, Bridgend with 161.2, Conwy and Flintshire with 149.3, Swansea with 140.1, Blaenau Gwent with 131.7, Neath Port Talbot with 129.8, Denbighshire with 124.4 and Caerphilly with 109.9.

The **Wales** overall infection rate is **125.9** per 100,000, which is up on 122 recorded the day before. [You can see the figures in your area here.](#)

07:38

Stay-at-home fortnight being discussed

Shavanah Taj, Wales TUC general secretary, confirmed she had attended an urgent meeting yesterday (Thursday) afternoon with the First Minister that also included representatives of the CBI and other business organisations

She told BBC Radio Wales' breakfast show: "Currently we are talking about a stay-at-home fortnight, but the question is what does that look like and how does that actually impact jobs."

“We have asked for clarifications, but it looks like non-essential areas, shops and hospitality, will be shut. We haven’t seen the full list, it is being worked up. It looks like two weeks, but if that does happen we need to take the public with us.”

The general secretary said her understanding was that discussions would continue over the weekend to work out details ready for an announcement ‘early next week’.

Trade unions and businesses have been asked to detail concerns.

She added: “The hospitality industry supports tens of thousands of jobs throughout Wales. We need to do whatever it takes to make sure that these workers are not left unsupported.

“It’s not just those directly employed by venues who could be left without a wage but people in a range of jobs including freelance musicians and artists.

“The impact this is having on associated industries, like suppliers and taxi drivers for example, cannot be ignored either.

“Welsh Government has done a great deal to support these workers, including through their Freelancer Fund, but we need to make sure that the impact on all affected workers is considered and mitigated when any new restrictions are introduced and avoid job losses and business closures at all cost.”

07:29

Welsh Secretary says travel ban 'risks stirring division and confusion'

The First Minister is likely to explain more on Friday about how the proposed ban on people entering Wales from UK coronavirus hotspots will work.

It comes as the Welsh Secretary warns that the ban “risks stirring division and confusion”.

In a letter written to First Minister Mark Drakeford asking for clarification about the restrictions, Simon Hart also expressed his concern over comments that Welsh residents “would be on the lookout” for visitors breaching them.

On Thursday, Mr Hart wrote: “I remain worried that, without rapid explanation, this approach risks stirring division and confusion in Wales. We both know that, in reality, communities in Wales are as hard-hit by Covid-19 as English, Scottish, and Northern Irish communities.

“Your recent comment about residents in West Wales being ‘on the lookout for people who shouldn’t be in those areas’ is an example of exactly the situation we should be trying to avoid.”

Mr Hart also asked for a number of clarifications, including how the decision was made

to restrict travel, legal guidance on how it is lawful, whether university students would be allowed to travel home, and how it will be enforced, all to be addressed by 4pm on Friday.

He also asked whether holiday accommodation providers would be expected to refuse or cancel bookings from guests they believed were breaking the travel ban.