

Scientific evidence on the spread of the virus in hospitality settings

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 20 Medi 2021
Petitions Committee | 20 September 2021

Reference: SR21/0497-1

Petition Number: P-06-1171

Petition title: Publish clear evidence that COVID 19 is spread by pubs and restaurants practising social distancing.

Text of petition: Many people are disgusted that the Welsh Government enforce the ongoing Covid restrictions. Many argue it is an affront to human rights in a civilised democratic society.

The restrictions should be advisory only with the consequences for individuals clearly communicated. I.E risk of infection, illness, passing infection to others and possible death.

Many people are concerned about the ongoing collapse of the economy, people's livelihoods, suspended hospital treatments for non-covid related illness, severe travel restrictions etc.

Unable to get tested without displaying any symptoms, unable to have an antibody test.

All of this with no real tangible evidence demonstrated by Welsh Government health statistics.



1. Background

There have been a number of periods during the pandemic where Welsh Government regulations have impacted on pubs and restaurants. Senedd Research has published a [coronavirus timeline](#), which highlights key developments in Wales during the pandemic.

The [National fire-break](#) in Wales from 23 October to 9 November 2020 was in response to a sharp rise of coronavirus cases across Wales, and meant that:

All non-food retail, hospitality businesses, including cafes, restaurants and pubs (unless they provide take-away or delivery services), close contact services, such as hairdressers and beauticians, and events and tourism businesses, such as hotels must close.

On 30 November 2020 the First Minister of Wales, [Mark Drakeford](#), announced that further new measures were being introduced “as cases of coronavirus accelerate in Wales”. From 4 December 2020 pubs, bars, restaurants and cafes were not able to serve alcohol and were required to close by 6pm and only provide takeaways after that time.

On 1 December the First Minister made a statement in Plenary on the [December restrictions](#). He said that the Welsh Government recognised “the enormous effort made by the [hospitality] sector to comply with the regulations” but that “similar restrictions have had to be introduced in all other parts of the United Kingdom and, indeed, across the world”. The First Minister stated that:

The consumption of alcohol has been identified by health officials and policy makers internationally as increasing the risk of transmission, as social distancing can break down as people have an altered perception of risk.

The regulations were to be reviewed by the Welsh Ministers by Thursday 17 December, and at least once in every three week period after that date.

In response to the First Minister’s statement the then Leader of the Opposition, Paul Davies MS, voiced his concerns for areas in Wales “where there’s no evidence that hospitality interaction is leading to an increase in transmission rates”. The First Minister said that “the evidence is there” and referred to two

papers published by the UK Government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) in November which, he said, reviewed "the measures that have succeeded across the United Kingdom". These papers are cited below.

There were subsequent lifting of restrictions. On 23 April 2021, the **First Minister announced** that from 26 April outdoor hospitality could reopen. On 14 May 2021, the First Minister **confirmed** that from Monday 17 May the whole of Wales would move into **alert level 2**, which would include the re-opening of indoor hospitality.

2. Publications from scientific advisory groups

There are two main bodies that provide scientific advice used by the Welsh Government.

The **Technical Advisory Cell (TAC)** is an advisory body of the Welsh Government. It provides "scientific and technical advice to support Welsh Government decision makers during emergencies". This includes providing regular updates from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales to senior Welsh Government officials about outputs from SAGE. **TAC regularly publishes** summaries of the advice it provides to the Welsh Government along with more subject specific research.

The UK Government's **SAGE is responsible** for ensuring "timely and coordinated scientific advice is made available to decision makers to support UK cross-government decisions". It relies on external science and advice from expert groups including its own sub-groups such as the **Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (SPI-M)** and the **Independent Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Behaviours (SPI-B)**. **Publications from SAGE** are also available on the UK Government's website.

2.1. SAGE papers referred to the by First Minister

The evidence informing decision-making is continually developing and updating. On 12 November SAGE considered a paper from its modelling sub-group (SPI-M) on **tiers in England and other measures in the devolved nations**. This is one of the SAGE papers that the **First Minister referred to in Plenary in December 2020**. The second paper that the First Minister referred to was from the **Impact of Interventions Task and Finish Group** dated 19 November on the **four nations' autumn interventions**. This paper was **updated on 26 November**.

2.2. Hospitality settings and transmission

SAGE and TAC have published other papers which refer to the hospitality sector and the transmission of COVID-19. These include, but are not limited to:

- [Non-pharmaceutical interventions table](#), 21 September 2020 (SAGE);
- [Technical Advisory Group: fire breaks](#), 19 October 2020;
- [SARS-COV-2: Transmission Routes and Environments](#), 22 October 2020 (SAGE);
- [SAGE 63 minutes: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) response](#), 22 October 2020;
- [Summary of evidence on costs and benefits and potential mitigations for measures to address COVID-19 in Wales](#), 25 November 2020 (TAC);
- [Transmission risk in the hospitality sector](#), 27 November 2020 (SAGE). Provides an overview of SAGE papers on the issue;
- [Environmental Modelling Group \(EMG\) Transmission Group: Insights on transmission of COVID-19 with a focus on the hospitality, retail and leisure sector](#), 8 April 2021 (SAGE).

3. Welsh Government response

The Minister for Health and Social Services has provided correspondence dated 8 September 2021 to the Committee. This sets out that the regulations in Wales are formally reviewed every 21 days, taking account of the latest scientific evidence:

When restrictions are no longer proportionate, Welsh Ministers are committed to amending or withdrawing them. The reviews consider the most recent public health situations as well as wider financial and well-being implications, with evidence from the Technical Advisory Cell (TAC) which includes, weekly summaries of advice, surveillance data (including the R value) and reports about specific issues. Welsh Government officials are also regular contributors at the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), and their outputs are published here.

The response notes that, whilst Wales is currently at [Alert Level Zero](#), there will be a continuing legal requirement for businesses, employers and event organisers to carry out a coronavirus risk assessment, and to put in place “reasonable measures to manage the risk of coronavirus”.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.