



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Health

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Health Protection (Travel Restrictions)  
Regulations

21 January 2021

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Health

### Health Protection (Travel Restrictions) Regulations

21 January 2021

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)  
Mrs Pam Cameron (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Paula Bradshaw  
Mr Jonathan Buckley  
Mr Gerry Carroll  
Mr Alan Chambers  
Ms Órlaithí Flynn  
Ms Cara Hunter  
Mr Pat Sheehan

**Witnesses:**

Ms Elaine Colgan    Department of Health

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** Members, you will recall that, at last week's meeting, the Committee deferred its consideration of two of the statutory rules (SRs) regarding travel restrictions. That was in order to seek information from the Department on the evidence behind the reduction in the self-isolation period from 14 days to 10 days. The Department has now advised that the decision to move from 14 days to 10 days was made by the four Chief Medical Officers (CMOs), having considered the available scientific evidence on viral shedding and infectiousness and the behavioural evidence on adherence to self-isolation, and that this is consistent with a number of other countries. The Department further advised that decisions of this nature are made by respective professional advisers and policy leads across the North, England, Scotland and Wales and informed by the evidence provided by their respective health bodies. The Department has provided a link to an academic article in the 'British Medical Journal' on the incubation period of COVID-19, which it advises is indicative of the research informing the reduction of quarantine to 10 days. That article is included in your tabled papers.

Do members have any further issues to raise on the statutory rules before we go to the formal consideration?

**Mr Carroll:** Are we dealing with 325 and 326?

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** Yes.

**Mr Carroll:** Thanks. I looked through the academic journal, and I am more confused in a way. Maybe that is just my reading of it. I think that there is limited data to defend the reduction from 14 days to 10 days. Obviously, it is worth saying that nobody wants to keep people isolated for longer than is necessary, but my concern last week was that we could be rushed into making this decision. Last

week, we were not really presented with any rationale at all, bar the comment that the CMOs endorsed it, and that is very worrying. My understanding is that there is an issue around compliance. There is a perception or a belief that compliance wanes after seven or eight days or whatever the day is, but that is in part down to people being financially concerned and not having enough protection against being off work. I still think that there are concerns about this. Obviously, I do not have a wealth of medical data to back up my concern. The fact that we were led to go along with it because of other reasons caused me to stop and think about it. I still have those concerns.

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** Thanks, Gerry. I am conscious that the Minister will be at the Committee on 11 February. Like so many of the other SRs, the SR has wider issues and there is the potential for upheaval or confusion on some of the other issues that are involved. It is not just the issue of isolation. We will want to drill further into that. Some of the reading that I have done over the past while indicates that it reinforces compliance and makes it easier for people who are struggling to apply that. Isolation because of COVID-19 is something that we need to provide support to people on more broadly.

Are there any other comments, views, questions or points on the SRs? This is our last opportunity to discuss them.

**Mr Buckley:** The fact that only two people from Denmark who arrived in Northern Ireland from Dublin contacted the Public Health Agency (PHA) — it states that in the paper — perhaps illustrates that there is a need for better information sharing. Maybe that was mentioned when I took a comfort break, but it certainly should be raised. Furthermore, how will enforcement of pre-arrival testing differ from the current enforcement of the failure to self-isolate? It is not very clear. We probably do not have an official on the line who can answer that.

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** We have an official on standby who could come in on that question. I will check with the Committee Clerk. We also have a session planned with the two CMOs. There is a key point there about coordination.

**Mr Buckley:** I am happy to hold off until then. It is a question about these regulations. Information sharing has been raised on numerous occasions, and I am happy to leave those questions until we get a briefing from them directly.

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** OK. No other members have indicated that they wish to speak, so I will put the Questions formally.

### **Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** Do members agree formally that the Committee for Health has considered SR 2020/325, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to NI) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020, and has no objection to the rule? Are we agreed?

*Question put and agreed to.*

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** Thank you.

### **Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** Do members agree formally that the Committee for Health has considered SR 2020/326, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (NI) 2020, and has no objection to the rule? Are we agreed?

*Question put and agreed to.*

**The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew):** Thank you, members.