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Message to Jewish Communities in Scotland

The National Clinical Director, Professor Jason Leitch, and I are writing to you to share our very best wishes as you begin to celebrate Chanukah.

This past year has been tough for everybody, but we are acutely aware of the particular challenges that will come with celebrating Chanukah at a time when so many restrictions remain in place. We appreciate these restrictions mean you are unable to mark this important festival as you normally would.

We also understand that adherence to public health restrictions and guidance may feel additionally difficult when a temporary easement on household gathering restrictions will be coming into place only shortly after Chanukah celebrations. We understand that this will be disappointing and frustrating but we remain grateful for your understanding and support. We also would reiterate that our continued message over Christmas is to ask everyone to consider very carefully whether the opportunity to mix for a few days is necessary given the risk of spreading the virus.

The relaxation in the rules for this period announced by the First Minister concerns household gatherings and travel and will permit up to 8 people from a maximum of 3 households to form a 'Christmas bubble' from the 23-27 December.

The decision to implement the relaxation during the Christmas holidays has been made in partnership with the leaders across the UK. We recognise that social isolation and loneliness can hit people particularly hard over the Christmas period therefore we hope the easing of these measures will provide a degree of comfort and support to those who would need it during this time. We have taken this decision together with our four nations partners, in recognition of the fact that for many across our society, whether of faith or of none, Christmas is a particularly important time for families to come together during what is already a Public and School holiday.

The First Minister also announced that local authorities currently in level 4 will move to level 3 from Friday 11 December. Among other things, this means that places of worship – such as synagogues – will be able to welcome more people. I hope this helps to make Chanukah a little bit easier for members of our Jewish communities.

Throughout the pandemic we have all made sacrifices to keep ourselves, loved ones and communities safe. The recent news on vaccines is hugely positive, and we hope you can take some comfort from the fact that an end to this pandemic is now in sight. But whilst the vaccine programme is rolled out over the coming months, we must remain cautious as we still have some way to go before normality can begin to return.

Public health advice is pragmatic: reduce social contact wherever possible, don't go out to shops during busy periods, don't travel unless essential and work from home wherever possible. The purpose of these measures is to prevent further spread of the virus in Scotland and importantly to protect the most vulnerable. As we head into the winter months where we usually see increased rates of hospital admissions, our advice remains that communities should be doing all they can to follow this advice as this will reduce the strain on our NHS and will save lives across Scotland.

We also want to protect the progress we have made, and want to take this opportunity to thank Scotland's Jewish communities for the sacrifices you've made in helping us get us to this point. The support you have provided and continue to provide, to communities across Scotland in response to the pandemic has been invaluable and we will be forever grateful.

We will continue to work closely with Scotland's faith communities as we move forward with the roll out of the vaccine, work towards reopening our places of worship fully, and returning to normal as soon as it is considered safe to do so.

In the meantime, we appreciate your understanding and compliance with ongoing restrictions which remain vital to stay safe, protect others and save lives.

We send our best wishes to all of Scotland's Jewish communities for a happy and peaceful Chanukah.

Chanukah Sameach



AILEEN CAMPBELL



JASON LEITCH