



26th November 2020

RE: December Reopening – Government Restrictions

Dear Minister,

Nothing short of a disastrous December awaits our hotels sector if media reports and briefings by Government on the revised restrictions are correct. This can and should be avoided.

From the outset, hotels and guesthouses have committed to working closely with the Government as part of the solution for reopening society safely with public health the top priority for everyone. Regrettably, it appears that our role as a vital part of the infrastructure for facilitating and managing a safe reopening in December is not being fully recognised by policymakers and Government.

We believe the revised restrictions as reported will undermine the Government's objective of achieving a balanced approach that ensures continued public buy-in during the build up to Christmas. The economic implications will also be stark as many businesses will find that it is unsustainable to reopen for a shorter period with continued restrictions, which will further threaten livelihoods beyond this very different festive season.

We are speaking on behalf of 1,000 extremely challenged hotels and guesthouses – all of which will bear the financial brunt of the Government's decisions – with serious implications for the viability of their businesses and employment potential into next year.

1. Inter-county travel - At this late hour, we are again calling on you to use your influence in Government to achieve a more balanced approach that retains public buy-in, safeguards public health and avoids needless damage to the economy. In particular, we urge the Government to lift inter-county travel restrictions for the 5-week period from Dec 2nd to Jan 6th.

Continuing to restrict people's ability to travel during the month of December takes a sledgehammer to an issue that should be much more nuanced. Why restrict people's ability to travel outside their county in order to stay and dine in hotels, which are controlled environments?

Limiting travel to just a two-week period will inevitably concentrate the number of gatherings in people's homes over a short period, which poses additional avoidable risks.

It will also mean that many hotels will be unable to open at all for guests next month as it would be financially unsustainable if trading is for less than 5 weeks. This would erode the infrastructure and options available for hosting people, including families, safely over Christmas.

2. Safer Christmas solution - Hotels should be viewed as an important part of the infrastructure in enabling a safer Christmas. They provide safe, highly controlled environments i) for people to stay and ii) for small numbers of people to dine in a way that minimises risk.

Hotels have a proven track record based on extensive professional systems and processes around sanitation, social distancing, PPE and health & safety training of our teams to minimise the risk. Consider how different a dining experience in a hotel is to that of a private house setting:

- Hotels provide large, spacious restaurants and common areas
- Tables are strictly limited in terms of numbers of people and households
- We have all the systems and procedures in place for cleaning and sanitising
- Tables/seating are strictly spaced and traceable
- No sharing of plates / food served by staff wearing PPE
- When people get up from the table, they must wear a mask
- Mingling between people and between tables is not allowed

This is not the case in home/private house settings where people can let their guard down and indoor physical distancing can be a challenge due to space restrictions.

3. Public Health Data – Hotels and guesthouses have and continue to lead the way on Covid safety, with robust public health procedures in place and the highest participation rates in the Fáilte Ireland Covid 19 safety charter. This is borne out by empirical data and should inform decisions around the easing of restrictions. The numbers released by HPSC yesterday show that, of the 9,062 clusters reported in the country to date, 6,869 related to outbreaks in private houses while only 11 were associated with hotels, i.e. one tenth of one percent (0.1%). [Link to HPSC report – 25th November](#).

4. Economic impact - In striking the right balance, it is crucial to have a complete understanding of economic costs involved and longer term implications. For many hotels, bookings from within their own county would only account for less than 10% of their December business. There is therefore scant difference between level three and level five restrictions in terms of how hotels can operate.

Hotels and guesthouses across the country would face significant loss in revenue next month if the mooted Government restrictions go ahead. Given the enormous loss of revenue already this year, this will have a devastating impact – not only on hotels, but on their local economies, employees and communities.

We all accept that this Christmas will be very different and challenging for everyone. But it is vital that public buy-in is retained and that safe options are made available throughout December and the festive season.

I would urge you to give our position further consideration. We are available to meet to discuss the above at short notice.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Fenn
Chief Executive