

2021.03.02

**6 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the legal provisions regarding children under the age of 12 and gatherings (OQ.54/2021):**

Is it the Minister's intention to revisit the current position within the Gatherings Regulations and Order whereby children under the age of 12 are counted towards the number of people considered as taking part in a gathering? If so, when will he do so and, if not, will he explain why?

**Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

I am grateful to the Deputy for raising this point. As set out in my response to Written Question 81, I have already sought advice from the medical officer of health about exempting children below school age from the gathering limit, which is currently set at 10 people. Recognising that participation in playgroups, such as parent and toddler groups, is very important to the development of children under 5 years of age, as well as being important to their parent or carer's well-being, I propose exempting under-5s from the gatherings order in the very near future. The fine details are still being worked out but I will provide them to the Deputy as soon as possible.

**3.6.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I thank the Minister for his answer. I am absolutely delighted that the under-5s will soon be exempted from the gatherings regulations. I think that is critical. My supplementary question to the Minister is: would he please consider extending this? Following conversation with experts in the area, I have come to understand that under 7 or under 6 more sufficiently covers the early years stage. So would he please consider under 7 or under 6 but more ideally would he consider under-12s as other jurisdictions, such as Wales and Scotland have done I think throughout serious moments in the pandemic, including quite large spikes in case numbers?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

We do consider the position of children and the effect of restrictions on them. It is likely that any consideration for children under 12 will be given as part of the reconnection road map.

[10:45]

When we release a road map - shortly, I hope - we will pay special attention to children above 5 who, of course, are at school and still have their connections outside of their immediate households in school and after school clubs where there is no limit to numbers gathering.

**3.6.2 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier:**

Is the Minister able to inform the Assembly of how many children under 12 have had COVID locally and how many of those were under 5?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I do not have those figures to hand but I will get them - they must exist - and I will circulate that to the Members.

**3.6.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Would the Minister reconsider to include children at key stage 1, which is reception year 1 and year 2, with the exception with children under 5, alongside the statistics that can be produced?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

We will certainly give consideration to any suggestions. I think the Deputy is suggesting rather than a numerical age group, using the key stage of school. I think the particular emphasis here has been on children who are not yet of school age and understanding the effect of restrictions on them and their parents or carers where they have not been able to meet up except in extremely small groups, with others. A gathering limit of 10 meant that you could have 5 parents and 5 children. If now we say children under 5 are not counted in that, we could have 10 parents bringing along their 10 children. We think we are at a stage where that is safe to do so and would avoid the harm that is created by the isolation and loneliness that might be felt by those families. That is why we are making this move.

### **3.6.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

When I am addressing key stage 1, we are talking about reception, year 1 and year 2, children of 4, 5 and 6, some of them aged 7, and this is a clearer group because they are in bubbles at school. Would the Minister please provide statistics of how many of this group of key stage 1 had COVID so we can really decide if they can be included or not and what the risk there is?

### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I think we will have a record of the ages of patients with COVID or those tested positive, so that should be possible. I will attempt to get those details and circulate it with States Members. So, including those up to 7 years old, that is 5, 6, 7 and onwards up to 12 as requested by Deputy Alves, I believe.

[The following information was subsequently provided from the Department for Health and Social Services]:

### **COVID Positive Cases in Jersey by Age (Mar 2020 to 1 Mar 2021), children up to age 12**

<b>Age at swab</b>	<b>Count</b>
<b>0</b>	9
<b>1</b>	11
<b>2</b>	10
<b>3</b>	10
<b>4</b>	10
<b>5</b>	11
<b>6</b>	11
<b>7</b>	15
<b>8</b>	22
<b>9</b>	30
<b>10</b>	30
<b>11</b>	21

**3.6.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

Can the Minister outline for us at this point what the additional risk is of exempting children aged 5 to 12?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

It is about balancing harms and ensuring that there is not a spread of COVID that might develop into a cluster and then an outbreak. We know that among schoolchildren COVID cases have occurred not so much from children spending time together but families passing on COVID to the children. That seems to have been, in the main, what has happened. So it may be that there is not a great deal of risk in children but, of course, they already have their social contact within their schools and other day care settings, including after school clubs, which are not restricted at all. So their needs are being met there and it is a balance of trying to keep the rates of infection and the scenarios in which it may spread under control, but we are always looking at mitigating measures and the road map will also address that question in children.