

Statement by the Minister of Health, Mr Constantinos Ioannou, on the decisions of the Council of Ministers to contain the pandemic

Ladies and gentlemen,

When we announced the last package of measures on the 27th of November, we had left the door open for a partial de-escalation of some of the restrictions in view of the holiday season, provided that the epidemiological picture would allow it. We had also warned about the possibility of bringing back stricter measures if the situation was to deteriorate. The facts that we have before us leave us with limited options.

As you are all aware, during the last few days there has been a deterioration of the epidemiological indicators, the worst since the pandemic broke out. The cases are rising and many of our fellow citizens are in need of hospitalization. Unfortunately, some of them have passed away. There is a relative stabilization in hospitalizations, but we cannot be complacent. We are concerned about the continuous increase in positive cases as they are being recorded by the rapid (antigen) tests across Cyprus. This outcome indicates that the virus is everywhere, in every town, village and district. We want to suppress its further spreading before it is too late. This is why our efforts, over the next few days, will be extended to indoor areas that have large crowds and are of high risk.

Taking into account the above, on the basis of the suggestions by the experts, the Council of Ministers has decided **the extension of the validity of the current measures and their reinforcement with the following additional measures**, which will take effect on **Friday 11 December, at 6 in the morning**:

- 1. The operation of malls is suspended.** Superstores, department stores and large stores over 500 sq.m. (excluding food retail, i.e. supermarkets) will operate in compliance with the measure of 1 person per 10 sq.m. and with a ceiling on the number of customers.
- 2. The operation of catering establishments is suspended.** This measure concerns restaurants, taverns, cafés, pubs, snack bars and bars, cafeterias and catering establishments within canteens and / or sports clubs, cultural clubs, associations, etc., with the exception of their delivery and take away services. It is understood that after 9 p.m. only home delivery is permitted.

Catering establishments within hotels and tourist accommodation facilities may operate until 9 p.m. serving only the guests who are staying overnight in those premises. Catering establishments within the Larnaka and Pafos Airports are allowed to operate.

- 3. Church services and other forms of religious worship** in religious sites shall be performed without the presence of congregants. Religious ceremonies (weddings, christenings, funerals) are permitted with a maximum of 10 persons attending.
- 4. As of next Monday, 14 December, lessons/courses in public and private Lyceums, Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions will be taught online.** Kindergartens, Primary Schools and Gymnasiums continue to operate normally. At the same time, in addition to the suspension of sports and social activities for persons under 18 years of age, which is still in force, the operation of tutoring institutes is suspended.

I repeat, **the aforementioned measures come into force on Friday, 11 December, at 6 in the morning.** Based on our planning, **they will remain in place until midnight on 31 December.** Until then, the situation will be re-evaluated in order to review the measures, provided that the epidemiological picture allows it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All the above measures concern indoor areas where mass gatherings and high contact is observed, namely where the virus is more easily spread. With these measures we are trying to prevent aggravation of the situation, now that we still have the chance, before the epidemiological conditions become irreversible. Decisions on measures are made on the basis of data which are constantly changing.

We understand that, nine months into pandemic, the society as a whole, as well as each individual, is experiencing fatigue. We understand that this fatigue causes people to react and leads to either demotivation or non-compliance with the imposed measures, which in turn do not lead to the expected results. This fatigue concerns not only us, but also all governments, since it is not a phenomenon that is observed only in our country. We must endure this a little bit longer.

The arrival of the first batch of vaccines in the next few weeks, perhaps during the first days of the new year, is something that must boost our morale and make us stronger. We are currently preparing the vaccination programme, which will be announced very soon, so that the procedures to be followed are made known. Cyprus participates in all EU procedures to acquire the vaccine and I want to assure you that the State has taken all the necessary steps in order to provide the possibility of free vaccination to all Cypriot citizens, who wish to be vaccinated.

All the recommendations of WHO as well as ECDC point to not becoming complacent and slacken efforts during these times. Our concern is focused on the indications for a possible deterioration of the situation in January 2021 and our strategic objective remains the containment of the spreading of the virus in order to safeguard the national Health System and public health.

Together we will try to stop this deterioration of the situation, now that we still can. As I mentioned before, we will constantly re-evaluate the facts before the expiration of the measures, in the hope that, if conditions allow, the measures will be revised during the festive season. But I don't want to raise high expectations. It all depends on the epidemiological conditions. And whatever relaxations there are, if any, we must realize that this Christmas season will be different.

There are no good restrictive measures and pleasant prohibitions. But there are measures that are necessary, and sometimes unpleasant, aiming to safeguard human lives. At this time, our health comes first. With this priority that the State has set from the beginning of the pandemic in our country, everything else follows. This is what our conscience imposes. This was always our responsibility as a State towards our citizens. At the same time, we are listening carefully to the concerns of the business world affected by the measures, so from the very first moment the government has implemented support schemes for the affected businesses. Therefore, the Support Schemes announced by the Government and implemented by the Ministry of Labour will continue to apply with the necessary amendments for

the month of December as well, in order to support both the employees, as well as the businesses affected by the new measures. In addition, new plans will be implemented by the Ministry of Finance for further support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

From the beginning of the Pandemic, we knew that the conditions we would live in would be unprecedented, with implications for the daily life of each individual and of society as a whole. We knew we were going to run a marathon and we had to preserve our strength in order to reach the finish line with as few losses as possible. Once again, I urge you to continue the effort for a while longer, until we are finally safe.

Thank you.

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