

ΑΝΑΚΟΙΝΩΘΕΝ

Statement by the Minister of Health, Mr Constantinos Ioannou, during the announcement of the 1st phase of the strategic lifting of measures

We are in the 3rd week of lockdown, which entered into force on 10 January 2021, and the improvement of the epidemiological picture allows us to begin to gradually de-escalate the restrictive measures.

As we have stressed several times, the de-escalation steps will be gradual, coordinated and controlled, so that the epidemiological situation can be monitored and the possibility of epidemiological deterioration reduced. Decisions are taken not only on the basis of a reduction in the number of cases, but also take into consideration other epidemiological indicators such as the situation in hospitals, which remains quite difficult. Our goal is to continue to see a decrease in the number of hospitalized persons in relation to the reduction of cases, while our attention focuses on people who are hospitalized in a serious condition in High Dependency Units and Intensive Care Units.

In addition to the epidemiological picture, the action plan for the gradual lifting of restrictive measures that has been developed takes into account the three-fold consideration “test – vaccinations – strict surveillance of the measures”, without ignoring recommendations for alertness to concerns at European level about the aggressive spread and transmission of the new strain of the virus, as well as developments in vaccination issues.

Based on the above parameters, we want to avoid hasty high-risk moves that will undermine the effort to relaunch, as quickly as possible, social and economic activity in order to return quickly but safely to normal conditions.

After analyzing the epidemiological data and evaluating of the factors mentioned above, the Council of Ministers, after hearing the recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Committee and the proposals of the technical committee from the relevant Ministries, decided to lift measures for the period 1-15 February, as follows:

The following shall apply **as of Monday, 1 February**:

1. Re-opening of barbershops, hair salons, beauty salons.

2. Increase from 25% to 50% of the percentage of personnel who may have a physical presence in private service businesses, without a minimum and maximum number of people.
3. House gatherings are prohibited, with the exception of up to two (2) persons visiting, provided they are 1st and 2nd degree relatives.

From Monday, 8 February 2021, the following also enter into force:

1. Re-opening of public and private primary schools, Lyceums and Technical Schools for 3rd Grade students only.
2. Re-opening of retail shops, including department stores and shopping centres.
3. Re-opening of betting shops, only for the purpose of completing the voucher, without the use of tables and seating arrangements.
4. Re-opening of museums and other archaeological sites.
5. The Divine Liturgy in places of religious worship may be held with the presence of congregants with a maximum number of persons up to 50 people, in compliance with the health protocols.
6. Increase of the number of people in house gatherings, to four (4) persons visiting.

Further clarifications which may arise on the implementation of the measures will be provided within the day.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you know, in recent months an important weapon in our strategy to tackle the pandemic has been the large number of rapid antigen tests carried out in the community, which allows us to have rapid and reliable epidemiological surveillance in real time.

Thus, using the rapid test tool, and in order to reduce the risk of spreading the virus in workplaces and in the general population, the Ministry of Health has designed a targeted control plan of rapid testing in the workplace for all groups of employees who will be reactivated. In particular, on the basis of the strategy, employees returning to their workplace will undergo a rapid test, which will be provided free of charge by the Ministry of Health through the test units. Therefore, on the basis of the above announcements, from tomorrow and until Sunday, a testing programme will be implemented for all workers employed in hair salons, barbershops and beauty salons, who will be reactivated as of Monday, February 1st. At the same time, as of 1 February, the mandatory weekly check through rapid test of 20% of staff working in operating businesses takes effect. In particular,

20 % of their employees should have a rapid test at any time and on a weekly basis. In order to achieve this objective, employees will be able to go for a test to the Ministry of Health Testing Points as of tomorrow.

The gradual safe restart of the economy presupposes strict adherence to the health protocols. All employees and employers, professional associations, trade unions and other organizations are kindly requested to ensure that the updated directives are implemented diligently. At the same time, all the competent Ministries entrusted with responsibility to supervise the implementation of the measures are prepared for more effective monitoring. The present improved epidemiological picture essentially reflects the measures that were implemented during the holiday season and onwards. Therefore, in the coming days we will be evaluating the measures that will be implemented as of now and taking steps towards further de-escalation of the restrictions accordingly. I repeat that the de-escalation steps should be gradual and controlled in order to move further away from an unsafe zone.

As we have said many times, an important weapon in the fight against the virus is vaccination coverage of the population. Despite the delay in the supply of vaccines, we are optimistic that we will cover the lost ground as we have ordered far more vaccines than those correspond to the population of Cyprus. The interest in being vaccinated in our country has surpassed initial assessments and this makes us content. Our goal is to have completed the vaccination of people over the age of 80 as well as health professionals of the 1st line by the beginning of March, and by the end of March, in line to the plan, to have vaccinated 100,000 of our fellow citizens. In this way, we will unburden and at the same time shield the Health System, protecting our fellow citizens who have an increased risk of serious illness and hospitalization. The vaccination shielding of a critical group of the population will allow us to continue the de-escalation plan with more confidence and safety.

Thank you. I am at your disposal for questions and clarifications.

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