

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

The Council of Ministers was briefed on the epidemiological situation in the country and examined all aspects of the health crisis.

The increasing number of infections, combined with the intense pressure on the Health Services, due to the large number of hospitalizations, does not leave us indifferent and imposes difficult decisions and drastic measures, in an effort to stop the spread of the virus in the community, in an effort to curb hospital admissions, and to safeguard the provision of the optimum medical care we offer to our fellow citizens in need.

The National Report reflects the critical situation that exists since the upward trend of the epidemic, the high viral load in the community and the pressure on hospitals continue. Vaccination helps and this is reflected in the reduction of hospitalizations for individuals over 70 years of age, but we must protect those at risk. The only option left is to impose these strict measures that will reduce mobility, the circle of our close contacts and positive cases.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the anguish expressed by health professionals in the COVID wards and the Intensive Care Units, who have borne the burden of caring for our fellow citizens. The Health System is under intense pressure and we need to ensure in every way that the health services provided will continue to be offered at a high level.

In view of all the above, the Council of Ministers decided to proceed with strict measures for a short period, aimed at partially halting the growing transmission of SARS-CoV-2, which could offer time to benefit from vaccination and de-escalate partially the pressure on the Health System.

Therefore, as of Monday, 26 April 2021, at 5 a.m. until Sunday, 9 May 2021, at midnight, the Council of Ministers decided the following:

1. Movement is prohibited from 9 p.m. until 5 am of the following day except in the following cases:

- Moving to and from the workplace and for working purposes using the “Confirmation for Employee’s Movement” Form.
- Going to a Medical Centre or a Hospital or a pharmacy or a veterinarian.

2. Meetings, public gatherings or social events, irrespective of venue (private or public space), indoors or outdoors (e.g. squares, dams, picnic areas, marinas) are prohibited.

3. By way of exception and only for Easter Sunday (2 May), in addition to permanent residents, persons from only two families may be present in houses, provided that the total number of persons in the house does not exceed 10 persons, including minors.
4. Only one movement is allowed per person per day via a text message to 8998. Movement for vaccination purposes against COVID-19, does not require a text message.
5. Church and other forms of religious worship in religious places will be performed without the presence of believers.
6. Religious ceremonies (weddings, christenings, funerals) with a maximum of 10 persons are allowed.
7. The presence of believers in places of religious worship is permitted for the purpose of individual prayer and with a maximum number of 10 persons present at the same time.
8. The presence of believers in the courtyard of the temples is permitted only for Holy Saturday (May 1st), in compliance with the measure of distancing and the health protocol applicable to the operation of the churches, and provided that arrangements will be made for believers to be seated. Inside the temples, only on Holy Saturday the presence of up to 50 people is allowed, on the basis of the protocol. On all other days of Holy Week, the presence of believers in places of religious worship is prohibited either indoors or outdoors.
9. On Holy Saturday (May 1st), to facilitate the participation of believers in the Resurrection Mass, the curfew begins at 1 a.m. (Holy Saturday to Easter Sunday) instead of 9 p.m. Saturday night. On all other days, the curfew begins at 9 p.m.
10. Remote work in public service is a compulsory for at least 20 % of the staff, with the exception of essential and other services, which will be defined by a Decree.
11. For private service providers the simultaneous physical presence of 20% of the staff is allowed, with a minimum number of three employees and a maximum of 25 employees per professional practice/legal entity.
12. Increase of the mandatory rate of rapid testing on a weekly basis to 50% of employees. It is understood that businesses/services that will have a physical presence of up to five (5) persons, testing is mandatory for all five persons.
13. The operation of all restaurants (restaurants, tavernas, cafes, beer bars, snack bars and bars, cafeterias and dining areas in shopping centres, canteens and/or sports clubs, cultural centres, clubs, unions, etc.) is suspended, with the exception of the services related to delivery and take away. It is understood that after 9 p.m. only home delivery is allowed.

14. The operation of open and closed theatres, amphitheatres, cinemas and event venues is suspended.

15. The operation of retailers, other than retailers of beverages and food, or sales of essentials as defined in the Decree, is suspended.

16. The operation of gyms, dance schools and other sports schools is suspended. Personal training is allowed in open spaces, where access is allowed on the basis of the Decree with a maximum number of two persons present.

17. The operation of gambling and betting shops is suspended.

18. The operation of barber shops, hair salons and beauty institutes is suspended.

19. All group tutorials, as well as sports and social activities for children under the age of 18 are prohibited. It is understood that distance learning and teaching with a physical presence of up to two persons, including the teacher/trainer (1+ 1) are permitted.

As of May 10, 2021, the above measures are lifted and the arrangements in force are reinstated, provided that in places where there is a gathering (dining areas, meeting places, gyms, retail shops, theatres, etc.), the visitor should carry a rapid test or PCR valid for 72 hours or have been vaccinated with at least the 1st dose of the vaccine three weeks before or to have been infected by the Covid-19 during the last three months. The adoption of the above regulation will allow for easier and safer movement and return to normality.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the government has set only one goal; save lives and be able to offer high-level medical care to anyone who needs it. We are at a particularly difficult stage in this pandemic. The number of cases and the positive rate are above the threshold, hospitalizations are increasing and the Health System is under pressure. The State Health Services Organization has activated a plan to provide more beds in public hospitals with the assistance of the private sector, where other incidents are referred, but we cannot remain indifferent to the continued increase in cases in the community.

The epidemiological data are burdened by the British virus mutation, which is observed at a very high rate and contributes to an increase in positive cases especially among younger ages.

The only way to stop the aggressive transmission caused by mutated strains is vaccination. To this end, we have accelerated the rate of vaccination coverage, taking into account the rapid shielding of a larger percentage of the population, at least with the 1st dose of the vaccine. Personal physicians who wish to do so, can join us in this battle. With vaccination, we aim to achieve asymptomatic and/or mild disease in patients, which in turn prevents hospitalizations and deaths.

At the same time, a key component for improving epidemiological indicators is the faithful implementation of personal, social and professional protection measures. I appeal once again to all citizens to be vaccinated without any hesitation or delay. At the same time and until we build our immunity wall, we must continue to be careful. Vaccination and compliance with the measures by each individual, responsibly and in a disciplined manner, will give us our lives back. The next few days will be difficult, and we call upon all citizens to cooperate, so that we can succeed in this effort, as well.

The imposition of these measures, though harsh, is necessary to bring us safely closer to the end of this ordeal. The responsibility we have is to ourselves and to our society as a whole.

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