

Address by the President of the Republic Mr Nicos Anastasiades on the gradual easing of covid-19 lockdown measures

Dear compatriots,

In my address on 16th April I stated that “In the past few days, the messages we get increase hope, however they do not mark the end, there is still unfortunately some distance which we have to cover with the same caution.”

Today I will repeat, with the same insistence, that the distance we need to cover remains unfortunately, long.

Nonetheless, the progress which continues to be made, allows us to implement the first phases of the strategy we have adopted for the gradual easing of restrictive measures.

Dear friends,

I shall not become tired of repeating that any progress or the risk of backtracking on what has been achieved depends on our behavior.

At this point, allow me to state in public that I feel really proud of the responsible attitude the political powers and the social partners display, of the excellence of our scientists, the self-sacrifice of the health professionals and all those who are on the front line.

In particular, though, all of you for your remarkable patience and discipline to the unprecedented measures imposed on citizens who, by their nature, have learnt to live freely.

At the same time, I would like you also to feel proud because once more, as a result of everybody’s efforts, our small homeland has become, to date, a country of reference for its successful tackling of yet another crisis.

Due to this progress the Council of Ministers has decided today, to take a series of decisions with a view to lift a number of restrictive measures which, on the one hand, will allow the gradual return to acceptable ways of living, and on the other will not jeopardise everything which we, through our sacrifices and your sacrifices, have achieved.

Dear friends,

During today’s Cabinet meeting, and having taken into consideration the proposals of the scientific team, the recommendations of the European Commission and those of the World Health Organisation (WHO), we decided on the first two phases for the gradual lifting of restrictions, which begin on May 4 and May 21 respectively.

During the first phase:

A. The Economic Sector

(i) As of May 4, restrictions in the construction sector and in all related business activities which support this sector are lifted.

(ii) All businesses in retail trade, except commercial centres and big department stores, can start operating. It is understood that the operation of the shops shall be governed by the safety and health protocols as these will be determined by the competent Ministries of Health and Labour.

(iii) Flee markets, street vendors and bazaars can open for business, always under the terms and conditions included in the relevant instructions of the Minister of Health.

(iv) Tourist offices and tourist agents can start working again.

B. The Public Sector

As of May 4th, the Public and the wider public sector will be fully operational, with the return of all the employees at their work. The working schedule will be determined by the competent Ministers. Those who belong to vulnerable groups, as these are defined in the new revised list published by the Ministry of Health, are exempt.

(i) All employees who have the responsibility of caring for children up to the age of 15 will have the right to be on leave until the state and the private schools open.

It is understood that during their absence, they are obliged to carry out any duties assigned to them via teleconferencing.

(ii) Those who belong to the vulnerable groups and who will not return to their work place will also work via the same method.

(iii) The return to work of public servants makes it possible for the courts to convene, always in line with the decisions which the Supreme Court will take.

C. Educational Sector

(i) Giving priority to the need for sufficient preparation of school graduates of the state and the private schools in secondary education, their return to school was decided for May 11.

The Minister of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth will make the relevant announcement about all the other educational levels. It is understood that education through teleconferencing will continue until the full operation of school units.

D. Public Health

In the context of normalising operation of public and private hospitals, restrictions will be partially lifted as from 4 May and will continue towards that direction depending on the instructions of the Ministry of Health, while dental centres will resume operation.

E. Personal Liberties.

With regard to personal liberties and the existing restrictions, the following measures have been decided:

(i) The number of permitted movements within a day by sending SMS increase to three (3). Ban on movement remains in place from 10.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m.

(ii) As of May 4, the exercise of religion will be permitted in churches, mosques and other places of worship, provided that there are no more than 10 persons present. The decree on weddings, christenings and funerals remains in force.

As of June 1, church services and other forms of religious worship in churches, mosques and other places of worship are permitted, provided that protocols on hygiene, as determined by the Ministry of Health, are strictly adhered to.

The same measures are valid for weddings, christenings, and funerals

At this point, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Head of the Church of Cyprus for the remarkable cooperation and the responsibility demonstrated in handling such a sensitive issue.

(iii) Personal exercise is permitted (jogging, swimming in the sea, bicycling etc.) outdoors, walkways in parks, in groups of not more than two persons. Underage children are not included in the above number.

Parks, playgrounds and other open spaces, will remain closed.

F. Sports.

As of May 4, the use of open space athletic installations will be open to high performance athletes who are included in the records of the Cyprus Olympic Committee.

Training of team sports will be permitted as from May 18 in open spaces and in accordance with the protocols issued by the Ministry of Health.

It is noted that in both cases, personal and team sports, the use of changing rooms, gyms or any other indoor installations is prohibited.

Dear friends,

As I have repeatedly stated, everything depends on the strict adherence to the epidemiological protocols and the instructions issued by the Ministry of Health.

Consequently, the decisions regarding measures of the present phase or the second phase will depend entirely on the epidemiological indicators and the recommendations of the scientific team.

Subject to the above, the measures decided for the second phase include the following:

1. As of May 21 all restrictions of the movement of citizens are lifted.
2. Visit to parks, open space playgrounds, squares, marinas etc. will be permitted, provided no more than 10 persons are gathered at any time.
3. Catering business will resume operation only in outer space and in strict adherence to the protocols of the Ministries of Labour and Health.

4. Hairdressing salons, barber shops and beauty centres will resume operation as of May 21.

5. As of June 1:

(i) Operation and access to organised beaches will be permitted.

(ii) Ports will begin full operation, excluding the disembarkation of passengers from cruise ship.

(iii) Public libraries, museums, archaeological, and historical sites will reopen.

(iv) Betting shops will resume business.

I would like to emphasize that resumption of the above businesses and other activities will be adjusted in strict accordance with the terms and conditions specified by the Ministries of Health and Labour.

At the same time, I would like to point out that the Government's plan of action is being implemented for the gradual repatriation of students and other Cypriot citizens who were stranded overseas as a result of the measures taken.

Dear friends,

I would like to be very clear on the following:

The duration of the measures is closely related and will depend on whether the exemplary mutual respect and solidarity the vast majority of the people have demonstrated up to now, continues.

But I would also like to stress that:

The unpredictability of the coronavirus and the aggressiveness of the illness does not allow for any misapprehensions.

This is why we have reservations in accepting the numerous requests on the part of the various business sectors.

Countries that have adopted the de-escalation of measures in order to restart economic activity are now experiencing rise in covid-19 cases and deterioration from the successful course they had been following.

Dear friends,

The coronavirus pandemic does not only threaten the health and lives of citizens but world economy as well. This is why the Government, while its primary concern is to protect the health and life of the people, does not disregard the agony of thousands of workers, employers and businesses.

As you know very well, while announcing the restrictive measures, at the same time we concentrated on the need to support and protect jobs and the liquidity of businesses as well as to meet the needs of vulnerable groups.

We did not hesitate to broaden the criteria in order to support professional groups which under different circumstance would not have been included in the Government's assistance schemes.

I wish to assure you that the Government will manage the financial consequence caused by the pandemic with the same responsibility it is demonstrating in protecting public health.

To this end, the Minister of Finance, the financial team of the Government, the scientific advisors, in cooperation with the political forces and the social partners continue to work on specific and structured plans, in the framework of a comprehensive plan on the financial management of the crisis.

Dear friends,

No Government planning, no comprehensive plan to tackle either the pandemic or the financial consequences can have the desired results if everyone does not realize that we have to abide strictly by the personal hygiene protocols and the conditions for health security at workplaces.

If we all act with a sense of responsibility and demonstrate the same consistency and prudence, I have no doubt that we will succeed.

On May 4 the first timid steps to leave our shelters are being taken. This creates an additional responsibility. We all have to protect, by our behaviour, over and beyond ourselves, our loved ones, our friends, our colleagues and our compatriots.

I repeat that the danger has not faded. As the scientists reiterate, the coronavirus will be with us for a long time. The instructions are clear: We have to follow diligently the rules for hygiene, but also to follow faithfully the recommendations and the guiding lines of the scientific team and the competent Authorities.

Any deviations or lack of discipline will not lead us, as we all wish, to the next stage but to the previous one. It will be back-tracking which nobody, but nobody wishes.

Dear friends,

Today we are making a careful step forward.

If we all behave with a sense of responsibility and show the same consistency and wisdom, I have no doubt that we will make it.