

## **Introductory statement by the Minister of Health Mr. Constantinos Ioannou at the joint press conference with the Ministers of Finance and Labour**

Since day one, when we were called to deal with this unprecedented crisis, we set out as our top priority the safeguard of the health system and the protection of the vulnerable groups of the population. We asked for time to be able to provide increased support to our hospitals and you gave it to us. Today, we are in a position to announce details to ease restrictive measures, on the basis of what the President of the Republic announced yesterday, we owe this to your cooperation and we thank you once again.

The encouraging epidemiological picture which is being shaped in Cyprus and which allows us to take the step towards the gradual lifting of restrictions, as we had planned, is the result of arduous effort which is based on the strategy of strict contact-tracing of cases and the simultaneous managing of cases.

In spite of the initial mishaps, we developed reflexes fast, and the Inter-ministerial Committee was activated, guided by the scientists. We developed quickly reflexes and being the Government we placed the safeguard of Public Health as our top concern. We gained vital time which allowed us to improve on all levels. At the Ministry of Health, operating State Health Clinics and organising State Hospitals to deal with “suspect cases” at Short-stay Care clinics and suspects at each hospital produced results. Having self-confidence in the strength of the health system, with sufficient infrastructure, adequate workforce, equipment and consumables, we are ready now for the next step which will take place on Monday, with the objective for a gradual return to normality.

In order to ensure that the situation will remain manageable, our steps will be slow and steady. In particular, the public and the private hospitals will begin to operate gradually, but under specific restrictions as follows:

- Visits will continue to be forbidden.
- Start of non urgent cases with a ceiling of up to 60% in terms of bed capacity, which will be adjusted depending on how the Pandemic is developing and the course of cases, on the basis of the guiding instructions of the Ministry of Health.
- Reopening of dental surgeries
- As far as state hospitals are concerned:
  - Organising and operating Outpatients’ Clinics for specialist doctors, only by appointment to ensure the protection of patients as well as that of the medical staff.
  - Moreover, state hospitals will adjust their operation in order to have increased availability to treat COVID-19 cases.

### **Safety and Health at the workplace**

Easing the restrictive measures as of Monday May 4 is not an easy undertaking at all. It conceals many dangers, on a personal as well as on a collective level. We have issued analytical instructions which all workers will have to follow. In cooperation with OEB, CCCI, POVEK and other professional associations, these instructions will be disseminated to all the businesses which will return to work. Our joy for the reopening of a significant number of shops and other professional premises is accompanied by our intense concern regarding an increase in cases, just as it has happened in other countries, for example in Germany.

In summary, as of Monday, the following hygiene measures shall be in place at businesses which will reopen:

- v 8 square metres for each employee and 2 metres distance between them
- v compulsory placing of an antiseptic at every entrance to the business
- v posting outside the premises the number of persons within the premises to inform the public and to facilitate the work of Labour Inspectors
- v daily and diligent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces which are used regularly, etc
- v immediate access to masks, thermometers etc.

It is understood that the workers must follow strictly hygiene rules.

### **Protective masks**

The Ministry of Health ordered one month ago a large quantity of protective masks, before there was a recommendation for the use of protective masks. We have bought 9 million, ordinary surgical one-use masks, which will be given out to the public and the wider public domain, as well as to affected businesses to cover part of their needs. The delivery of the masks to businesses will be completed by Sunday, in cooperation with OEB, CCCI and POVEK as well as other organised groups.

I would like to stress that the use of a mask is **compulsory for those workers** who have direct contact with the public (Public and wider public sector, retail trade, public transport means).

The use of a mask by citizens in a community is recommended for popular and closed areas, such as supermarkets, big shops, public transport means etc.

In plain words, the cashiers and the rest of the workers in supermarkets, the employees in shops, bus drivers and in general the private, public or municipal workers who come into contact with people **are obliged** to wear a mask. Supermarket customers and customers at other closed shops and bus passengers **are encouraged to wear a mask but they are not obliged to do so.**

### **Workers who belong to vulnerable groups**

The protection of the health of our compatriots who belong to vulnerable groups remains a priority for the state. For this reason, yesterday we updated the list of vulnerable groups depending on the level of risk from exposure to the virus, based on the epidemiological figures so far and the morbidity of patients with COVID-19. On the basis of the new list, vulnerable groups are divided into two categories:

**The first category** includes the patients and other persons who can work provided they are not in areas where they have exchanges with the public and not many people pass through these areas.

**The second category** enlists patients and other persons who are considered very high risk and are asked to work from home.

The new list was published yesterday and it is available on the special website of the Press and Information Office.

To further protect our compatriots who belong to the vulnerable groups, we decided, with regard to specific cases, to refer special categories of people to Clinics of the State Health system to be tested for coronavirus, which will be subsidised by the Ministry of Health. Indicatively, such cases are the following:

- v Cancer patients before they are admitted for therapy

- v Pregnant women prior to delivery
- v Elderly people before they are admitted to care homes
- v Abused persons (adults and children) before they go into care homes.

### **Extensive diagnostic tests**

The programme of extensive diagnostic tests, which is in place now, is part of the strategy to deal with the virus, the strategy which I mentioned in the beginning of my statement. So far, we have more than 55,000 registered diagnostic tests, a number which places Cyprus among the first countries in Europe. This method, coupled with the strict contact-tracing, has proven to be particularly effective on a pan-European level and in fact has been congratulated by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

As an indication, I would like to mention that the **Programme 20,000 tests** concerns citizens who are working and whose jobs have not been suspended during the restrictions. So far 17,601 have been tested and 28 of them tested positive.

I would like to stress that in order to secure equal access of workers to the Programme, specific percentages for the categories as these had been defined were given.

In addition, in view of the policy to boost further laboratory testing, the Council of Ministers decided to renew the Programme and carry out another 20,000 diagnostic tests, free of charge, on workers who will return to their posts on Monday. Specifically:

1. For those working in the retail trade who have direct contact with the public, 14,000 laboratory tests will be carried out
2. For those working at building sites, 6,000 tests will be done (3,000 on site with the help of a Mobile Unit, following an understanding with the Ministry of Labour and 3,000 with appointments)

Moreover, sample taking among the public has been completed. Out of 1,054 persons selected, 773 volunteers turned up to give a sample. Only one positive case was found among these volunteers. I would like, taking this opportunity, to thank the volunteers who participated, the OAY and the Clinics of the State Health system for organising this so well and for completing this procedure within a few days.

More specifically, the **Strategy to lift the restrictive measures and restart the economy** has been outlined in 4 phases, which were approved by the Council of Ministers, and will be adjusted according to the epidemiological statistics, as follows:

#### **Phase 1: 4 May – 20 May 2020**

- Construction sector and all relevant economic activities
- Retail trade – reopening of all the shops, except those which are housed within shopping centres/department stores. The days and the working hours of the shops will be defined by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance and the Ministry of Health.
- Open markets, street vendors
- Docking of cruise liners for supplies (without disembarkation of passengers or crew replacement).
- Replacement of crews of commercial vessels and transfer of private crafts to licensed locations for the purpose of berthing, maintenance and repairs.

- Lyceums: only graduates of state (3<sup>rd</sup> grade in Lyceum) and private schools in secondary education (as of 11 May). For the remaining grades in education, the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth will announce a relevant plan. It is understood that tele-education will continue until school units begin to operate fully.
- Planned surgeries will take place, based on the ceilings set out by the Ministry of Health.
- Dental centres/dentists' surgeries (all those which have been closed since the Decree issued on April 23)
- Use of open and outdoor sports installations only for athletes of high achievements who are included in the list of the Cyprus Olympic Committee, without the use of changing rooms, exercise areas or other related closed infrastructure.
- Training for group sports only in open spaces, without the use of changing rooms, exercise areas or other related closed infrastructure (as of May 18)
- Tourist offices and travel agents
- Full operation of car wash facilities
- Review of instructions regarding public transport (capacity up to 50%)
- Full operation of the Public Service and the wider public sector

It is important for the economy to see the industry and the manufacturing sector to operate fully

It is stressed that the reopening of economic activities will be done on the basis of the guidelines or the protocols, as already mentioned.

### **Measures on Movement**

- 3 SMS per day, it is forbidden to be outdoors from 10 pm until 6 am.
- Individual exercise is allowed in open areas, no more than two persons together (walking, tennis, swimming in the sea but not in public or private pools, cycling etc). Path walks and walks within a park will be open only for the purpose of individual exercise and no more than two persons at any given time. Gatherings will not be allowed. Under age children of parents who are exercising are exempt from this restriction.
- As of May 4 it is allowed to pray in church, mosques and other places of worship, provided that no more than 10 people are present at the same time.

### **Phase 2: May 21 – June 8**

- Hairdressing salons/barber shops/ beauty salons (as of May 21)
- Catering services, only in open spaces (as of May 21)
- Libraries (as of June 1)
- Museums, archaeological and historical sites (as of June 1)
- Betting Shops (as of June 1)
- Ports in full operation (as of June 1), excluding for disembarkation of cruise ships passengers.

It is stressed that resumption of economic activities will be based on the directives or, protocols, as already specified.

### **Measures on Movement**

- The obligation to send SMS will be discontinued as of May 21.
- Gatherings of up to 10 persons will be permitted.
- As of June 1, church services and other forms of religious worship in churches, mosques and other places of worship will be permitted, provided that protocols on hygiene, as determined by the Ministry of Health, are strictly adhered to. The same measures apply for weddings, christenings and funerals.
- Movement will be permitted in parks, open space playgrounds, squares, marinas etc., provided no more than 10 persons are gathered at any time.
- Restrictions on movement between 10.00 p.m. and 6 a.m. will be lifted.

### **Phase 3: 9 June – 13 July**

- Shopping Centres/ Department Stores
- Airports/Airlines, gradually and conditionally
- Ports, services to cruise ships
- Catering Services, services both indoors and outdoors.
- Hotels
- Beaches: provided social distancing is adhered to.
- Open air theatres and cinemas.
- Gyms
- Athletic competitions (without spectators)
- Summer courses of private institutions of tertiary education.

It is underlined that resumption of economic activity will be in line with the directives or protocols, as already specified.

### **Measures on Movement**

- Lifting of all restrictions

### **Phase 4: as of July 14 onwards**

- Indoor theatres and cinemas
- Festivals and concerts
- Casino
- Playgrounds both indoor and outdoor

A special action plan will be developed for the gradual resumption of operation of all the above sectors.

It is emphasized that resumption of economic activity will follow the guidelines or the protocols as already specified. It is pointed out in particular that the number of people who will be permitted to participate in large events will be determined at a later stage.

Concluding my introductory statement, I would like to reiterate how crucial the following period is. I am certain that just as we have managed up to now, all together, with a sense of responsibility, we will continue in our successful path and we will not find ourselves in the unfortunate position to regress. We have confidence in the responsibility and conscience of every citizen. Cyprus has come through the first trial with success. Practice has demonstrated that with prudence and cooperation we can, as a state, achieve a great deal. However, we need patience. It is up to us to survive this crisis with the least possible losses and to prove that, once again, we will succeed.

Thank you very much and I am at your disposal for any questions.