

**Statement by the Minister of Health, Mr Constantinos Ioannou, on the
Government's decisions to address the pandemic**

In the last two weeks we were in the unpleasant position to take restrictive measures in order to tackle the spread of the coronavirus all over Cyprus, especially in the Districts of Lemesos and Pafos, where the epidemiological burden was high.

The picture we have before us allows us to proceed to some changes without deviating at all from our strategic goal of curbing the virus and preserving the Health System.

Cyprus, unlike nearly all the European countries, has not moved to a second overall lockdown and this is precisely because, despite the epidemiological burden, we believe that for the time being we can keep this extreme measure in reserve, in case it is necessary.

I do not want to beautify this picture. During the last period, our Health System is under pressure. The patients who are being treated today are the positive coronavirus cases that we had 10 days ago who have shown deterioration. In November, we had 26 new admissions to the Intensive Care Units, while 22 fellow citizens lost their lives as a result of the virus. Nearly half of the deaths (48 in total) since the outbreak of the pandemic were recorded in November. This is a negative element that imposes the need to seek ways to stop new outbreaks.

Taking into account that in the District of Lemesos, despite the decrease, the situation remains epidemiologically burdened, and the fact that in the rest of the Districts at an island-wide level there is an increase, all data was evaluated and **it was decided to take extraordinary measures, which will come into effect on an island-wide basis as from 30 November to 13 December 2020.**

Basically, the measures that are in force in Lemesos and Pafos, are extended on an island-wide basis with some variations, such as:

1. The movement of persons is prohibited from 9 at night until 5 in the morning of the next day, with the exception of movement for work reasons with the use of the

Employee Movement Confirmation Form, or for movement to/from hospital, pharmacy, vet for emergency medical reasons.

2. Church services and other forms of religious worship in religious places, as well as religious ceremonies **are allowed with a maximum of 75 persons attending**, following the guidelines that have been issued by the Ministry of Health.

3. Religious ceremonies are allowed (weddings, christenings, funerals) **with a maximum of 10 persons attending**.

4. The holding of lunch/dinner and any other event for weddings and christenings is prohibited (other than a home event with a maximum number of 10 persons including minors).

5. The functioning of catering establishments is allowed (restaurants, taverns, cafeterias, pizzerias, pubs, snack-bars, bars, coffee shops and catering areas in canteens or/and sports clubs, cultural circles, associations, societies etc) **with the exception of services concerned with home delivery and take - away**. After 9 p.m. only home delivery is allowed.

6. The prohibition of movement of persons from and to the Districts of Lemesos and Pafos, and also between the two Districts, ceases.

7. The following are allowed:

- The functioning of retail, large shopping centres, malls, as well as large stores, with a restriction in the number of persons served (1 person per 10 sq.m. maximum at a simultaneous physical presence).
- The functioning of beauty centres and tattooing shops.
- The functioning of hairdressing saloons and barber shops.
- The functioning of Driving Schools.
- The functioning of archaeological sites, museums and historical sites.
- The functioning of open-air and indoor theatres, amphitheatres, cinemas and performance halls at 50% of their capacity.
- The functioning of shopping malls (1 person per 10 sq.m. maximum simultaneous physical presence).
- The functioning of galleries, art galleries, art exhibitions.

Moreover, if the epidemiological situation improves, we will proceed with the easing of measures across Cyprus, from the 14th of December 2020 until the 7th of January 2021. Indicatively, I note the following:

1. The movement of persons from 11 o'clock at night until 5 o'clock in the morning of the following day is prohibited, except for those going to and leaving from the workplace with the use of the Employee Movement Confirmation Form, visiting a medical centre or hospital or pharmacy or vet for emergency medical reasons.

With the only exception the 25 of December 2020 and the 1st of January 2021, during which movement will be prohibited from 2 am – 6 am.

2. Gatherings of persons in residences are allowed, with a maximum number of 10 persons per residence, including underage children.

There will be an exception to this measure as regards the period from 23 December 2020 until 1 January 2021, during which the maximum number of persons allowed per residence will be 15.

3. Catering establishments are allowed to operate until 10.30 at night.

An exception will be made for Christmas eve (24 December) and New Year's eve (31 December), during which catering establishments will be allowed to operate until 12.30 at night.

4. Indoor and outdoor sports facilities, gyms, dance schools and other types of schools and sports, are allowed to operate without the presence of spectators and without the use of changing rooms.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The measures are being assessed on a daily basis, while the situation at the reference hospital and the other hospitals is being monitored, especially admissions to the Intensive Care Units. At present the situation is manageable, however, the conditions of the pandemic are volatile and could take a turn for the worse at any given moment, like what we see happening in many other countries. I want to be honest with you: If the situation deteriorates we will have no other option but to bring back stricter measures, if this is deemed as the appropriate decision.

The measures taken two weeks ago, as well as those decided today, were based upon socio-psychological factors. I acknowledge that there is fatigue and that the uncertainty caused by the pandemic is upsetting our daily lives and affects us on a psychological level. I also acknowledge that due to fatigue, compliance with the measures is rendered even more difficult. But we, as Government, have a duty to set the protection of Public Health as the focal point of our decisions. A mobilization of this magnitude is bound to have mistakes and omissions, for which I apologize to the citizens for the inconvenience of the last few days. Our concern is the shielding of the Health System, so that it can respond to the needs of our patients.

We have said many times that this effort requires great endurance. The state of emergency will be terminated only when a large portion of the population is vaccinated. News coming from the scientific community makes us optimistic that the vaccine will be ready sooner than expected. As you are aware, Cyprus has taken timely actions in order to ensure sufficient quantities. These days the vaccination programme which will be applied to Cyprus, is being formulated so that priority will be given to our fellow citizens who are vulnerable, namely chronic patients, the elderly, parents, grandparents, health professionals.

I kindly appeal to you. I ask for your understanding and assistance. This year's festive season will be unprecedented, and we may be deprived of loved ones and things we like. However, we need to remain focused on the efforts to save our health; to safeguard the Health System so that it endures for those who need it. Let's dedicate this Christmas to the people we love, to all those we ought to support and protect.

Thank you very much.