

## **Statement by the Minister of Health, Mr Constantinos Ioannou, on the decisions to restart the economy and social activity**

Following an evaluation of the epidemiological picture and taking into account that epidemiological indicators record a stabilisation in recent days and that there is a gradual decline in hospital admissions, the Council of Ministers has decided on a series of measures for the gradual restart of the economy and social activity.

As you have already been informed on Wednesday, the de-escalation of measures will be gradual and depending on the epidemiological picture as it develops. The removal of the various restrictions aims at the psychological uplift of citizens after months of sacrifices. However, the return to more normal conditions must be achieved safely and carefully. For this reason, the restrictions cannot be completely abolished at this stage. But they are being adapted on the data of the current period.

Consequently, the Cabinet, honouring its commitment of 2 weeks ago, has decided to gradually unlock the economy and social activity. With a deadline set for 1 June, it was decided to gradually de-escalate in three phases, in order to allow more time to stabilise the epidemiological indicators while accelerating vaccinations, in order to achieve the target of administering at least the 1st dose of the vaccine to more than 60% of the population by the end of June.

In the 1st phase and until 16 May, the measures which were in force until 25 April are reinstated with the same restrictions and health protocols. The aim is a smooth transition to the next phase as of 17 May, when more businesses will be reopened and there will be more relaxations in social activities. Indicatively, as of 17 May, the number of persons in cultural sites and places of religious worship will increase, the organization of social events such as weddings and christenings will be allowed, businesses which have been closed for months will be allowed to reopen, such as playgrounds, luna parks, casinos, zoos, picnic areas.

Then, assuming that the epidemiological picture will be improved with the contribution of vaccinations, from 1 June we will proceed to further relaxations that are closer to conditions that existed before the pandemic.

In addition, in order to achieve the best possible harmonisation, it was decided to abolish the measure for sending a written message for movement purposes. Henceforth, in order to be more secure when we are present in specific areas where there is congestion and an increased presence of individuals, it has been decided that in overcrowded areas (e.g. shopping centers, restaurants, churches, etc.), along with the use of masks and other personal protective measures, one of the following conditions should apply:

1. Individuals should have been vaccinated with at least one dose and a period of 3 weeks should have elapsed; or
2. Have been infected with COVID-19 in the last 6 months; or
3. If one of the above does not apply, and as a temporary solution until vaccination coverage is further advanced, citizens aged 12 or over will be given the option to present a certificate of negative test, PCR or rapid test, valid for 72 hours. For example, if the test has been carried out on Sunday at 10 a.m., it will be valid until Tuesday at midnight.

This measure is temporary and will be implemented for a transitional period in order to ensure that our movements and social contacts are made with as much safety as possible for our personal health and for public health. The aim, at the same time, is to achieve the desired immunity through vaccinations.

More specific information will be provided within the day.

It is also clarified that the responsibility for checking for the possession of evidence does not lie with the managers of the businesses, but checks will be carried out by the officers of the Police or of the competent Ministries and Departments depending on the businesses that fall within the areas of their competence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The period we are going through is crucial and will determine our further steps. The goal at the moment is to speed up the vaccination coverage of the population. The results of the vaccinations have begun to show a positive change in epidemiological data in our country as well. Having exceeded 33 % of people vaccinated with the 1st dose of licensed vaccines, we are already seeing the benefits since the cases of serious illness and hospitalisations of the elderly, in particular, have decreased to a very large extent, as a result of very high vaccination coverage in older ages. The Ministry of Health continues its commitment to the implementation of the vaccination plan, having increased its ability to carry out more vaccinations per day. The response from citizens for vaccination is particularly encouraging and this gives us optimism that we will soon be able to move on to even more relaxations. We see younger ages showing an increased interest in vaccination, and that is encouraging. Only by collective effort will we achieve immunity and take our lives back.

The target we have set for vaccination, namely at least the 1st dose of more than 60% by the end of June is achievable and feasible. At the same time, however, we need constant vigilance and adherence to the personal protective measures. Personal precautions are simple and do not affect our daily lives. The application of protective measures combined with vaccination is our vehicle for exiting the difficult conditions of the pandemic. The horizon of June and the end of these unprecedented conditions are near. We can and we will quickly get our lives back.

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