

## **Statement by the Minister of Health on the decisions of the Council of Ministers regarding the pandemic**

I would like to convey to you the anguish and concern of the members of the Council of Ministers with regard to the difficult days we are experiencing. Not only in Cyprus, but across Europe, across the globe.

The whole of humanity is in a constant “war” with a deadly virus that changes faces, mutates, adapts, spreads fast, and in some cases, strikes instantaneously and creates very serious long-term problems in vital organs.

The Covid-19 disease became the cause of more than 5 million, 310 thousand people losing their lives all over the world!

Unfortunately, last week, in Cyprus, due to this disease we lost fellow human beings who could have been saved and who basically refused the help of our doctors and hospitals. This is inconceivable and unacceptable. The acknowledgement of science has been and remains a key component of humanity’s progress for centuries.

We often say that health is the most valuable asset for human beings. But life itself is the ultimate gift!

In the “war” against the pandemic, we are responsible for what happens to us, but we cannot act so selfishly, so irresponsibly. Have we ever thought how painful these attitudes can be for our families, for our relatives, for our friends?

The entire scientific community across the globe has been sounding the danger alarm for several months.

In this state of emergency, the strict implementation of the measures proposed by the experts, and vaccination, which is considered the most powerful weapon of science, are not a matter of individual choice. We cannot be indifferent to the protection of those around us and to the grief that we may cause to our loved ones.

Last week, I attended the EU Health Ministers’ meeting. There’s no other way; the end of the coronavirus will come ONLY if we follow the experts’ instructions. Anything else is considered dangerous.

Two years after the beginning of the pandemic, science has advanced, we have acquired knowledge and data, we have developed weapons to deal with this unprecedented phenomenon. Since the beginning of the administration of the vaccines worldwide, we now have compelling evidence that the vaccines are effective against the spread of the virus and severe disease, and the loss of lives. I refer to Israel as a strong example, where hospitalizations are kept at very low levels due to the country’s very good vaccination programme for the third dose, and the participation of citizens.

The Government does not discriminate between our fellow citizens.

The Ministry of Health does not discriminate between our fellow human beings.

We offer equal opportunities for everyone to protect their own health but also the health of their loved ones.

Vaccination saves lives!

The Council of Ministers decided:

- a) as of 16 December 2021, vaccination against Covid-19 of children aged 5-11, with vaccinations being carried out at Maternity and Welfare Centres of the Ministry of Health in all Districts.
- b) from 15 December 2021 to 15 January 2022 vaccinated individuals declared as close contacts of a confirmed positive case shall be required to undergo rapid antigen tests within 72 hours and on the 7th day, a PCR laboratory test through public health clinics. Individuals who received the booster/3rd dose of the vaccine are excluded.
- c) as of 15 December 2021, the mandatory isolation of persons whose sequencing of positive samples relates to the "Omicron" strain or any possible future mutation, to locations designated by the Ministry of Health. The contacts of the specific cases must remain self-isolated, regardless of vaccination coverage, in accordance with the Ministry of Health's protocol.
- d) the review on 15 January 2022 of the previous decision of the Council of Ministers to abolish the SafePass for those individuals who do not receive the booster/3rd dose of the vaccine against Covid-19, after 6+1 months. It is clear that in the cases of individuals, where a period of 7 months has elapsed from the second dose of vaccination for the two-dose vaccine and for the single dose vaccine, these individuals should undergo a 72-hour PCR laboratory test or a 48-hour rapid antigen test, for Safe Pass purposes.
- e) as of 15 December 2021, the exemption from the mandatory SafePass possession check through the CovScan Cyprus application, of the individuals who have proof and a Medical Council certificate that they cannot be vaccinated. These individuals should demonstrate the special card issued by the Ministry of Health and at the same time a Rapid laboratory test or a PCR test on a weekly basis with a negative result.
- f) from 15 December 2021 until 31 January 2022, admission to social events, such as weddings, christenings and catering areas within hotel units, may only be allowed to persons who have received at least one dose of the vaccine, provides that they hold a negative PCR laboratory test or rapid antigen test. The previous decision of the Council of Ministers shall also apply to the following areas: closed and outdoor stadiums, theatres, cinemas, showrooms, music dance centres, entertainment centres and catering establishments.

- g) the cancellation, unless the health protocols for Christmas events organized by companies, organizations and associations, indoors and outdoors, are followed.
- h) as of 15 December 2021, passengers arriving in the Republic of Cyprus are required to undergo a Rapid antigen test after 72 hours from the date of arrival. The rapid antigen test will be provided free of charge through the sampling points of the Ministry of Health, by showing the boarding pass and proof of identification (identity, passport). Individuals who received the booster/3rd dose of the vaccine are excluded.
- i) from 15 December 2021, the reduction of the period to 5 months and two weeks instead of 6 months, for the administration of the booster/3 dose of the vaccine.

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