

Statement by the Minister of Health on the decisions of the Council of Ministers

We have all gone through difficult times in the past period, as strict measures had to be taken to ensure public health, to keep the economy going and our schools open. With everyone's contribution, we have succeeded. With sacrifices, restrictions in our daily lives, changes in our habits, and certainly losses for many which cannot be replenished, we resisted the attacks of the deadly virus.

During the last few days, a stabilisation of the epidemiological indicators and a significant decrease of the pressure on the health system have been recorded, which allow us to have a moderate sense of optimism regarding the course of the pandemic. We acknowledge that stability is not guaranteed, and that without everyone's effort, on a collective and personal level, the epidemiological picture can change at any time. It is for this reason that our scientific team is constantly monitoring the epidemiological indicators and their progress.

What is important is that we have won the bet by opening the schools and keeping them open during Christmas, and at the current phase we are in a position to make adjustments to the restrictive measures, with relaxations. Today, with more data and tools at our disposal, we can plan our next steps.

However, our steps must be firm and carefully considered, as examples from other countries, which have fully lifted the restrictive measures, show that there is a risk of deterioration of the epidemiological picture. We are taking into consideration citizens' concerns and desires and are making every effort for a speedy and safe return to our daily lives as soon as possible.

In view of the above, the Council of Ministers has decided:

- a) **as of 21 February 2022**, the lifting of the entry ban for individuals without vaccination history in catering establishments, entertainment venues, dance and music halls, stadiums, theatres, cinemas, performance spaces, weddings, christenings and accommodation in hotels or tourist establishments. **Entry will be allowed upon presentation of a SafePass (24-hour Rapid test).**
- b) **as of 21 February 2022**, the increase in the maximum number of persons in catering establishments, entertainment venues, dance and music halls, weddings and christenings, **from 200 to 250 persons**, in compliance with

- the health protocols and the maximum number of persons per square metre that is in effect.
- c) **as of 21 February 2022**, the increase of the number of persons per table in catering establishments, entertainment venues, dance and music halls, weddings and christenings, **from 8 to 12 persons**.
 - d) **as of 21 February 2022**, the increase of the number of persons gathering in houses **from 10 to 20 persons, excluding children up to 12 years of age**.
 - e) The lifting of the ban on dancing and the increase of the maximum number of persons in catering and entertainment establishments, **following the preparation of a specific protocol**. The authorisation granted to the Minister for Health to consult with the bodies involved and the implementation of the protocol following approval by the Scientific Advisory Committee.
 - f) **as of 21 February 2022**, children **aged 4 years and over** who attend kindergartens and pre-primary schools are required to undergo a **Rapid test once a week**.
 - g) the introduction of the **“test to stay”** measure in kindergartens and pre-primary schools (excluding nurseries). The starting date and the manner in which the measure will be implemented will be announced after consultation with the competent departments, employees’ unions and parents’ associations.
 - h) the introduction of the **“test to stay”** measure in the Public Sector and Education Service. The starting date and the implementation details of the measure will be announced after consultation with the competent departments and the employees’ unions.
 - i) the extension of the measure **“test to stay”** in primary and secondary education.
 - j) **as of 21 February 2022**, the reduction of the teleworking percentage **from 50% to 25%** of the staff of each company or organisation in the service sector, excluding essential services. It is reminded that the percentage includes persons who are self-isolated because they are sick or declared as close contacts of a confirmed positive case and work from home, as well as persons who make use of their leave of absence.
 - k) **as of 28 February 2022**, the resumption of all non-urgent surgeries. It is noted that patients will continue to be referred to the Emergency Accident

Departments of private hospitals in order to decongest the Emergency Accident Departments within the GHS.

- l) **as of 21 February 2022**, for employees in day-care facilities for vulnerable groups, transitional hospitality hostels for the homeless, day centres and child protection facilities, a negative **72-hour PCR laboratory test**, or a negative **24-hour Rapid antigen test**, or a valid certificate of complete vaccination, or a valid certificate of recovery from COVID-19, will be required.
 - m) **as of 21 February 2022**, the increase of occupancy in stadiums to 70% of the capacity.
 - n) **as of 21 February 2022**, the increase of occupancy in theatres, cinemas and performance spaces to 75% of the capacity.
 - o) the extension of the validity of the existing measures **until 14 March 2022**.
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