

Statement by the Minister of Health, Mr Michalis Hadjipantela, on the Council of Ministers' decisions for containing the pandemic

All indexes confirm that the epidemiological situation in our country is getting worse. Cases are rapidly increasing, while hospitalisations have multiplied within the span of a few days. Many of our fellow human beings, who fell ill with covid, are hospitalised and their condition is serious.

The Council of Ministers, having considered all data and the experts' recommendations, has decided to take some additional measures, with the sole aim of stopping the fast spread of this lethal virus which is threatening our lives. We must protect our beloved ones. All together we must take our lives back, getting rid of any trace of threat to public health.

There are "weapons" to limit and eradicate the biggest enemy of humanity. The experts across the globe agree that these are vaccinations and personal protection measures. Vaccinations can provide protection against virus mutations.

We sense that our society is on the right track. The majority of our fellow citizens has already received the first dose of the vaccine at a percentage that will exceed 70% in the following days, while more than 60% of the population has completed its vaccination scheme. However, it is necessary to continue. We are not far away from the main objective.

The implementation of new procedures to facilitate and encourage citizens to be vaccinated has already yielded encouraging results. The efforts being made through the walk-in vaccination centres and the mobile units, have been embraced and this sends out optimistic messages.

We greatly appreciate the sacrifices of our people and must point out that there is no dispute with anyone. Any form of dispute is vain and pointless. All opinions are respected and treated with due consideration.

Labelling people into "vaccinated" and "unvaccinated" does not suit our culture and has no place in our society. We respect any reservations and objections. However, there are experts, scientists, more qualified than us, and it is worth hearing them and follow their directions. We must all stick together in this struggle!

It is imperative that we strictly observe some measures to limit the risks and take a big leap towards our freedom. We call upon young people, especially, to embrace this whole effort in order to protect themselves, primarily, and then their family members and our entire society.

The Council of Ministers has, inter alia, decided the following:

1. Camping is suspended. Ongoing camping trips must suspend operations as soon as the current accommodation of guests is terminated, by 23 July at the latest.

2. Only seated service will be provided at catering establishments, night clubs, event venues, discos and other places of entertainment, and the maximum number of persons per table shall be 10. All clients should be seated and dancing is prohibited at all times. Dancing is permitted only in premises/establishments hosting only fully vaccinated persons or persons who have recovered from COVID-19 in the last six months. The owner/manager of the establishment is obliged to inform in writing the Ministry of Health that his/her establishment will only accept fully vaccinated persons or persons who have recovered from COVID-19 in the last six months.

3. Up to 31 July, a SafePass is mandatory in all indoor and outdoor areas where more than 20 people may gather at any time, including the employees of the establishments.

4. A SafePass is mandatory for citizens in all services of the public, wider public and private sectors, banks, local authorities, public transportation means, passenger short sea vessels, etc.

5. Only the holders of a SafePass may visit nursing homes or/and other forms of elderly care units. It is recommended that their residents do not exit the units. When they return to their place of residence, they have to produce a negative rapid test.

6. The maximum number of people indoors is increased from 350 to 450, provided that they are all fully vaccinated or have recovered from COVID-19 in the last six months. The owner/manager of the establishment is obliged to inform in writing the Ministry of Health that his/her establishment will only accept fully vaccinated persons or persons who have recovered from COVID-19 in the last six months.

All details and information about the decisions of the Council of Ministers shall be included in the Ministry's detailed press release to be issued later on. The decisions shall enter into force on 20 July 2021 and be regulated by a Decree.

As regards the new effort with the walk-in vaccination centres, this constitutes a pioneering measure that we dared to implement in Cyprus. Citizens have embraced it and we we will continue our efforts to upgrade it. The reason why we have not made available great quantities of vaccines from the beginning, is because we wanted to avoid the waste from their non-administration, since unused vaccines are destroyed.

16.07.2021