

**Statement by the Minister of Health, Mr Constantinos Ioannou, on the
decisions of the Council of Ministers to contain the pandemic**

On 9 December the Council of Ministers took decisions in an effort to contain the spread of the pandemic by the end of the year. Our effort two weeks ago, focused on achieving a significant improvement in the epidemiological picture and significantly reducing the epidemiological indicators that were at their worst level since the beginning of the pandemic.

The figures we have before us after the evaluation of the data do not satisfy us. According to the Scientific Advisory Committee on Coronavirus, epidemiological indicators remain at unsafe levels and therefore no relaxation of the measures in force is recommended.

The stabilization recorded in the indicators is still at high levels. The number of cases remains high and this is reflected in the continued increase of the rate of positive cases from the rapid antigen tests across Cyprus. The number of hospitalised patients daily is between 110 and 130 people, while the number of intubated patients in the Intensive Units is also high, burdening the Health System. What is most worrying is the number of deaths that continue to be recorded and impose the adoption of measures to protect those who have an increased risk of serious illness.

According therefore to the above data and taking into account the social and psychological factors, as well as the fatigue that all citizens feel, the Council of Ministers decided today the following:

1. The measures announced on 9 December 2020 are hereby extended until 10 January 2021. The situation will be regularly evaluated by the Scientific Advisory Committee.
2. On December 24, 2020, movement will be allowed until 11 p.m. and on New Year's Eve until 1 a.m. with the maximum of 10 people gathering in homes, including minors.

3. Acknowledging the need for church attendance and since the protocol will be strictly applied, in cooperation with the Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus, only on 25th December 2020 and on 6th January 2021, church services shall be performed with the presence of a maximum number of 75 congregants, provided that the measure of one person per 3 sq.m. is upheld and in accordance with the square meters of the site. If there is a need for the attendance of more worshipers, it is recommended that more services take place on the above dates.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I said in my introduction, the burden on the epidemiological picture does not allow us much relaxation, even though that was our objective. There does not seem to be any significant improvement at the moment, and for this reason, we are continuing with very careful steps, with these small exceptions that will offer citizens psychological uplifting. As you can see, the whole of Europe is on high alert. The situation in Cyprus is serious, but we maintain in control.

I appeal once again to all of our fellow citizens: the only way to get out of this arduous and long-term adventure is to remain vigilant until we're safe. Counting backwards for the delivery of the vaccines and the start of vaccinations as of next weekend, I strongly urge everyone to be patient for a while longer, until we secure vaccination coverage of a large percentage of the population. The vaccine is the beginning of the end of this long journey and it is only half the effort offered by the scientific community. The other half is in the hands of each and every one of us, who are called upon to show responsibility by carefully obeying the measures.

22/12/2020