

The Government conceptually agrees on a strict scenario for stabilizing the epidemiological situation by Easter

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Assessing the threat of the spread of new, especially infectious virus variant in Latvia, the Cabinet of Ministers conceptually agreed at the extraordinary meeting on 9 March to strengthen security standards in several areas, including the working environment, for three weeks or until Easter. The Government reached this agreement after hearing an assessment by the Group for Coordination of Interinstitutional Activities, scientists, and industry experts on possible scenarios for the spread of Covid-19 and the contribution of existing safety measures to contain the disease, as well as the economic impact.

The Group for Coordination of Interinstitutional Activities, in collaboration with scientists and industry experts, carefully assessed how changes in safety measures and restrictions would affect the spread of Covid-19 in Latvian society and what the economic consequences would be. The work group concluded that relaxing or not changing the restrictions would open the door to much higher morbidity, and thus to hospitalization and human mortality. Therefore, for discussion in the Cabinet of Ministers, two courses of action were proposed on how to continue the downward trend of morbidity.

Conceptually, the Government decided to significantly strengthen safety requirements in domestic areas where experts have identified the highest risk of infection - in the working environment, while moving and traveling. At the same time, the control of Covid-19 infected and contact persons should be improved, testing should be concentrated in risk areas and the use of the app Apturi Covid should be encouraged.

99 Primarily, there is a need to significantly expand the approach to remote working in both public administration and the private sector. On the other hand, in those workplaces where it is objectively necessary to work on-site, safety protocols must be introduced, which include epidemiological safety measures, organization of on-site work and the responsible person.

It is also planned to aim for less crowded public transport, taking into account the specifics of different regions of Latvia. It is planned to achieve this in various ways - to increase the number of trips, to reduce the use of ticket discounts, to reduce or revoke the fees for municipal parking lots, as well as to promote travel on foot or by bicycle.

- 99 In order to reduce the possibility of bringing the Covid-19 virus into Latvia, the Cabinet of Ministers agreed that it is necessary to further restrict travel for non-essential reasons, improve control over the results of Covid-19 tests on immigrants, countries visited, and observing of self-isolation.
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The Government also confirmed the need for extensive testing and crowd screening of certain groups of people where risks are identified. Control of people infected with Covid-19 and their contacts should also be reinforced, including through the wider use of the app Apturi Covid.

The Cabinet of Ministers instructed the Group for Coordination of Interinstitutional Activities to develop a detailed course of action supported by the government by Thursday, 11 March, envisaging a way for educational institutions to continue full-time work in municipalities with lower morbidity levels, allowing a certain number of outdoor activities.

By next week, the work group should define indicators that would allow to reassess and gradually reduce the restrictions. Criteria should also be developed for dealing with the rapid increase in the spreading of Covid-19 and the need to respond with very strict constraints. In that case, an appropriate solution would be allowing only critical service providers and employees of manufacturing companies to work on-site, except for those who can perform their duties remotely. Restrictions on movement could also be introduced, setting out certain reasons why people are allowed to go outside the household. The health care system would then only provide emergency health services.

- 99 The Government's discussion took place considering the fact that Covid-19 infection continues to decline slowly. On average, 592 new infections are detected per day, which is about 5% of all tested. The new variant of Covid-19 is detected in more than a tenth of those infected. The 14-day cumulative morbidity rate per 100,000 people has decreased to 461.9 cases. Although the situation is gradually improving throughout Latvia, there is an increase in infections among children.
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Also, in accordance with the task given by the government, by the end of 2021 the State Chancellery together with sectoral ministries plans to expand the range of Covid-19 communication tools, flexibly adapting them to the current situation, adopted decisions, and common goal of reducing morbidity until herd immunity is achieved.

- 99 In cooperation with all sectors, the main emphasis will be put on communication activities that will promote epidemiologically safe behaviour of the population and facilitate the solving of issues of emotional and socio-economic status. Communication initiatives are planned to be focused on environments where, according to epidemiologists' analysis, infection and the spread of the virus are most prevalent, as well as in minority language groups.
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The widest block of campaigns and initiatives is planned for the communication of epidemiologically safe patterns of behaviour using various tools, including the development and implementation of social design or environmental design communication solutions. The topicality and implementation of the processes will be synchronized with the course of the vaccination process - the allocated funding will be used only if there is a justified, fact-based need for these initiatives.

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