

National Public Health Emergency Team

Overview of international reduction / cessation of Physical / Social Distancing  
Measures introduced in response to COVID-19

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Paper prepared by: DOF and NPSO

**Action required**

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

## **Overview of international measures introduced/to be introduced for the reduction / cessation of physical / social distancing measures introduced in response to COVID-19**

### **Purpose of this document**

This document is a brief overview of plans **announced** by other countries in relation to the reduction / cessation of social distancing measures, for possible consideration by NPHEt in its deliberation of measures for Ireland. It sets out different country approaches to lifting restrictions based on the key themes identified in the paper proposed to NPHEt.

### **Summary:**

- This paper summarises a very early overview of 20 countries including the EU/EEA countries, US, UK, Australia. The information is sourced from the HIQA *Review of restrictive public policy measures to limit the spread of COVID-19* and the intelligence provided by the Irish Embassies/Missions of the Department of Foreign Affairs.
- Not surprisingly, different countries have different areas of focus and so there are themes in this paper that countries are silent on.

### **Common themes:**

- Where countries have set out a de-escalation plan, approaches have varied from (i) two to three week intervals between phases; (ii) some have four week intervals; and (iii) some countries have taken the approach to only provide a date for initial phase(s) and further progression to be informed by trigger criteria;
- Even where de-escalation plans are in place, restrictions on mass gatherings remain in place, restrictions on large gatherings (weddings, church ceremonies) are very gradually phased; the service industry is more likely to be among the later phases in plans;
- The use of face masks in the community in some or all public places features in the approaches of many of the countries that have started to de-escalate measures, with some countries making them mandatory;
- Travel continues to be discouraged with quarantine regimes in place for residents and in some cases incoming travellers;
- There appears to be a proportionally greater focus on re-opening the retail sector when compared to other areas of the economy, and those occupations where working from home is difficult or not feasible. Countries are taking a very gradual approach to re-opening of their services sector (bars, restaurants, hotels) and it tends to be among the later phases.
- In terms of re-opening education, a common theme is the prioritisation of students in graduating years and/or sitting exams including state exams.

### **Lifting of Restrictions:**

- Since mid-April, a number of EU Member States have announced, and for the countries listed immediately below commenced, the lifting of restrictions; these include:
  - Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Poland, Slovakia, Switzerland, Iceland.

- Most have set out a gradual stepped approach with the main focus of their plans being on the early stages. In the main, their plans for later stages do not have a timeline for implementation. As mentioned above, intervals between phases tend to be two to three weeks.
- The experience of these countries:
  - Germany: individual states are taking different approaches to implementation of de-escalation measures, varying from liberal to remaining highly restrictive
  - Denmark: Prime Minister voiced concerns this week that re-opening the country is becoming more complicated and spoke of a fear of further infection.
- Other Member States including Italy, Portugal, and France are expected to announce their Plans this week with the likelihood that they take effect starting early to late May.
- Finally, a number of Member State have extended their period of current restrictions ('State of Emergency') and these include Spain, Belgium, Finland, Netherlands, Estonia, Croatia, and a number of smaller countries.
- Most countries are taking a national approach, Spain are considering (among a range of options) a regional approach. There are some examples of slower de-escalation in major cities.

Common across all countries is that any lifting of restrictions is premised on maintaining social distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

#### Use of Face Masks in Public

- Across the EU the use of face masks appears to be a key factor supporting the lifting of restrictions especially the re-opening of businesses and (some) schools and travel on public transport. Member States include: **Germany, Austria** (*making them available free at shops*), **Portugal, Czech Republic, Luxembourg** (*but for three weeks and subject to a review by Government*), **Slovenia, France, Italy, Poland** (*Govt. has launched "Polish sewing rooms" to produce 100 million affordable masks by end of June*) **Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia**
- **Spain** has distributed 10m protection masks on public transport across the country since mid-April.
- From May 11, **France** will provide masks to the general public, particularly for the professions most at risk. The wearing of masks in public may become required in certain areas, such as in public transport
- Of the Member States and EEA countries with de-escalation plans underway **Denmark, Switzerland and Iceland** are silent on the matter of face masks.
- **Finland** states it is *not a matter for the Minister for Health to issue guidance / recommendations* while the position of the **Netherlands** is that there *no evidence of the effectiveness of masks*.

#### Mass and large Gatherings:

- The prohibition of large and mass gatherings remains in place for the early phases. Some countries are introducing a phased increase in the number permitted in a gathering, eg increasing from 20 to 50;
- Re-introduction of large gatherings eg weddings, religious ceremonies tend to feature in the later phases of plans;

- Other restrictions to remain in place until later phases include, in some countries, visits to hospitals and nursing homes.

#### **Re-introduction of Non COVID Health Services:**

- A number of countries have mentioned specifically the re-introduction of non-Covid healthcare services and have included them in their early to middle (rather than late and final) phases
- The approach ranges from re-opening of Allied Health Professionals – physiotherapists, dentists etc. – through to elective IPDC and OPD services
- **Denmark, Norway** re-opened ‘Professions in which client contact cannot be avoided’ in April and within this category were many Allied Health Professionals as well as mention of private hospitals and clinics.
- **Australia** is aiming to recommence elective surgery from the end of April and provides a comprehensive list of procedures to recommence, which includes a range from urgent complex (cancers) to routine procedures.
- The **US** White House plan will phase in elective surgery on an outpatient basis in the first phase and extending to in-patient in phase two.

#### **Travel Restrictions:**

- Travel restrictions remain largely in place across most countries with many advising residents against unnecessary travel and if they do travel they will have to quarantine for 14 days on their return or prove a ‘clean bill of health’ for the previous month.
- A number of countries – **Spain, Norway** – are encouraging residents to holiday domestically.
- **Iceland** this week is extending a similar regime to incoming visitors, ie they will have to quarantine upon their arrival.
- In **Germany**, residents are still requested not to undertake any private travel or visits including day tourism and tourism between regions in Germany remains prohibited. Residents seem to still be able to visit second homes though it does depend on region.
- Hotels throughout Germany are not allowed to take bookings for tourism purposes. Germans have been advised, as tourists themselves, not to expect ‘a normal summer holiday season’.
- **Spain** have launched a ‘staycation’ campaign and are one of the few countries where re-opening of services and tourism sectors are being considered
- **Norway** have lifted their ban on people staying at their holiday cabins.

#### **Re-opening of Educational Institutions**

- Of the countries with explicit reference to planned re-opening of educational institutions approaches vary.
- However, there has been a broadly common focus taken to prioritise, in the early phases, the re-opening of schools for those sitting final exams, sitting state exams, or in their graduating year.
- **France** appear to be the only outlier and have cancelled state exams.
- **Denmark, Finland, Switzerland** are reopening schools starting with youngest schoolgoers in primary school and phasing upwards to more senior students

- **Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Slovakia** are phasing from senior students first to primary schools in the later phases
- **Slovakia** is prioritising exam students and in particular, at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, those studying health-based disciplines. While **Denmark** has reopened research laboratories for ph.d. students

#### **Re-opening of Retail Businesses:**

Some countries have not explicitly detailed the re-opening of its retail sector, of those that have:

- The phased re-opening of the retail sector appears to be the area of greater focus compared to other areas of the economy, this is based on explicit inclusion of that sector in plans.
- **Spain** appears to be among the outliers with expectation that the lifting of measures will not include retail stores (*notwithstanding it has extended its period of emergency, its focus is predominantly on its service and tourism industry*).
- The phased approach to re-opening includes based on area space ie 200m<sup>2</sup> increasing through phases to 800m<sup>2</sup> to 1000m<sup>2</sup> and the opening of shopping centres/malls is part of the final phase and many do not give indicative dates for this.
- Common to the first phase re-opening includes hardware/DIY shops, garden centres, bicycle repair shops. In Germany, bicycle repair, car dealerships and bookshops are exempt from their 800m<sup>2</sup> restriction, ie these businesses can open regardless of size.
- Car dealerships are among the early re-openers in **Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia**.
- **Austria** are re-opening based on the public health guidelines and restricted opening hours restricted and will impose a fine of up to €3,600 on business owners if in breach of conditions
- **Lithuania** specify that initial phase re-opening of stores will be for retailers that have direct access from the street

#### **Services Sector Bars, Restaurants, Hotels:**

- The re-opening of bars, cafes, restaurants, hotels are for many countries part of their later phases, albeit later phases for some countries could be as early as the end of May.
- Some are phasing in re-opening based on restricted number permitted on premises. Others have distinguished between indoor and outdoor premises with re-opening of outdoor restaurants more like to feature in earlier phases and indoor premises delayed until the later stages
- In countries where there are plans to re-open hotels it is on the basis of restricted food services ie room service only.
- As above, **Spain** appear to be more explicit in their prioritisation of their services sector and their larger hotels appear to be organising themselves planning for possible re-opening ie putting social distancing arrangements in place.

#### **Other Workplaces:**

- The re-opening of Hairdressers is generally not included in the initial phase but still early in country plans when compared to some other measures
- Of note might be that in a number of countries included Allied Health Professionals in the same category as hairdressers, beauty salons, tattooists (this paper separated them as a means of considering health in and of itself) ie a single category of '*professions in which client contact cannot be avoided*'.
- Some countries include the reopening of driving schools though the timing differs in terms of earlier vs later phase.

- A small number of countries have specifically included the re-opening of their construction sector in their early phases of de-escalation

#### **Office Working:**

- Very little explicit reference to office work included in the phased plans.
- Intelligence from **France** (*DFA mission report*) indicates their approach is to encourage tele-work to continue as much as possible unless the nature of the work or workplace makes it too difficult.
- **Greece** are expected to transition out of lockdown with certain Government services reopening incl. the Court of First Instance and the Land Registry

#### **Restrictions on Public Amenities**

- Libraries tend to feature in the middle phases for countries, though some didn't close libraries
- For countries which named them, cinemas, theatres tend to be in the same classification as large/mass gathering and so are in the final phase for re-opening.
- Distinction between indoor and outdoor amenities. Parks, zoos, gardens are among earlier re-opening in countries, while museums and other indoor amenities are among the later phases

#### **Sports, Cultural Events:**

- For those countries which have re-opened organised sports, the common approach has been to permit outdoor sports involving between two and four individuals, some countries have included golf, tennis. Where this is allowed there remains a ban on common spaces, showers etc.
- In the **Czech Republic**, Professional Athletes will be permitted to return to outdoor training from the end of May.
- Generally, initiatives for the reopening of gyms and Outdoor sport events for 50 people are not envisaged until the late and final phases of de-escalation plans for many countries.
- Where there are plans to re-open gyms in earlier phases, the ban on common spaces will remain in place.
- An exception is the **US** which will permit the re-opening of gyms in phase one
- Reopening of swimming pools appears to be in the final phases for a number of countries

#### **Childcare considerations**

- In Germany, emergency childcare will be continued and expanded to cover additional parent occupations and sections of the population with specific needs.
- In Belgium childcare facilities remain open and schools are available as a childcare option for essential workers
- In France childcare services have been provided for health professionals
- In Finland & Estonia, and Iceland Daycare Centres remained open.
- Slovakia and Lithuania not opening creches until final phase while Denmark are seeking to open them in their initial de-escalation phase