



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **COVID 19 - Cabinet takes policy decisions on public events after expert advice**

The full Government met in Cabinet this morning in order to determine a number of policy decisions in relation to COVID-19. This was the only item on the agenda.

Today's meeting was also attended by the Chief Secretary Darren Grech and the Director of Public Health Dr Sohail Bhatti. The Chief Minister invited the Director of Public Health to address the Cabinet on the issues which have already been extensively discussed in the seven weeks of Government action to date on this subject.

The key message to the public in dealing with Coronavirus COVID-19 is to take precautions, to plan and not to panic.

It is important that everyone follows the Public Health advice that has been issued so far and that everyone understands the importance of taking the simple health and hygiene measures outlined therein. The reason for this is to protect the most vulnerable in our community, meaning those over 70 or with a relevant, pre-existing medical condition.

The Cabinet has taken the following policy decisions today, based on expert advice, in relation to Government organised events.

1. Government organised events where more than 100 persons are expected to attend will be postponed to a later date or cancelled.
2. As a result, and after consultation with the organisers and the competitors, the Drama Festival will proceed without spectators.
3. The advice received is that the referendum on abortion will continue as it does not involve large public gatherings or people necessarily being within 2 metres of each other for more than 15 minutes. Appropriate sanitiser etc will be provided at the polling stations. This advice will continue under review.
4. Depending on the progress of the virus by the date of the show, the Miss Gibraltar Show will, if necessary, proceed without spectators.



5. The preparations for the Calentita Food Festival will continue for the moment, on the basis that it could be cancelled at short notice. Organisers and participating charities will be advised by Government of whether the progress of the virus makes the event at all advisable or not nearer the time.
6. The advice received to date suggests that the restrictions on public gatherings is likely to have changed by September but this cannot yet be confirmed with full certainty. As a result:
  - a. preparations for National Day will continue for the moment, on the basis that the main large public events could be cancelled at short notice.
  - b. preparations for the Monkey Rocks event will continue for the moment, on the basis that it could be cancelled at short notice.
  - c. the Cabinet, on the advice received, has decided that there cannot be a Gibraltar Music Festival in 2020. The reason for taking the decision at this early stage is because public funds would need to be expended now, in advance, on signature of contracts and no insurance is available at reasonable cost to cover the potential loss of fees paid if the concert has to be cancelled in September.

In addition to this, the Government has also received expert advice as to a number of sporting events, some of which are privately organised, but which make use of Government/ GSLA premises.

1. The Rhythmic Gymnastics National Championships due to take place this weekend and which involves visiting teams from the United Kingdom and Spain, will be able to proceed, however no spectators will be allowed.
2. The Gaelic Football Triangular competition due to take place this weekend at the Europa Sports Park will be able to proceed, however no spectators will be allowed.
3. The Gibraltar Snooker Open which is planned for 13-15 March , will be allowed to proceed on the basis of less than 100 spectators on the basis of tickets already sold. This event is also streamed and televised.
4. The Darts Open which is planned for 21 March at the Europa Sports Park , will be allowed to proceed on the basis of less than 100 spectators on the basis of tickets already sold. This event is also streamed and televised.
5. The World Pool Masters which is planned for 26-29 March at the Europa Sports Park, will be allowed to proceed on the basis of less than 100 spectators on the basis of tickets already sold. This event is also streamed and televised.

The Government wants to remind event organisers that travel restrictions apply to competitors or spectators from COVID 19 listed countries, as published in the Gazette.

The Government urges all organisations, institutions and sporting and cultural bodies to follow the Government's leadership on this matter and to reconsider the organisation of large group activities, events and meetings, particularly those where 100 or more attendees are expected.



In order to further protect the elderly, the Government will be meeting with religious leaders today in order to ask them to restrict religious services in a manner which is in keeping with the expert advice received in relation to public gatherings.

A number of other decisions taken today will be communicated through the relevant Government departments to those affected.

The Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, said: “Every single one of the decisions taken today, and any further decision we need to take, are being taken on the basis of the best advice available to the Government. We are acting to seek to slow the onset of the virus in our community but conscious that the identification of an index case confirms that the virus is already in Gibraltar and it will very likely spread widely. This should not be a cause for panic but for proper planning and for action to protect the most vulnerable in our community. That is what we are seeking to do, based on the advice of experts and the detailed work we have done as a government in the seven weeks to date since the virus was first identified as a potential Public Health issue.”

## **REMEMBER**

The Government is confident that Gibraltar is as ready as possible for the impact of the virus.

The Government continues to take the advice of our Public Health professionals and the situation is under constant review.

The best thing that everyone can do to protect themselves and their loved ones is to wash hands regularly and well with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. It is also a good idea not to shake hands, hug or give kisses when greeting colleagues, friends and relatives for the time being, especially if they are over 70. We know that the elderly and people with chronic health conditions are the most vulnerable, so we must all do our part to keep ourselves and our loved ones out of harm's way.

If you do not feel well, please *do not* go to the Primary Care Centre or to St Bernard's Hospital as this puts you and others at greater risk. Go home, avoid public transport and call **111** as soon as you can to tell us about your symptoms.

For almost 90% of people, the symptoms will be very mild and most people who contract the virus will be able to recover well and quickly at home. 99% of people will likely fully recover. The focus now is to increase the distance between people in order to try to slow the spread as much as possible, and to take extra care with older and vulnerable friends and relatives. Think twice before you pay them a visit and strongly consider whether you could phone or video call them instead.

Please look to official sources for advice, particularly [www.wuhan.gi](http://www.wuhan.gi).

- PROTECT your loved ones – call, don't visit
- WASH your hands
- CALL **111** if you feel unwell