



PRESS RELEASE

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Chief Minister's Statement - Press Conference 27th March 2020

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon

It falls to me and to the Director of Public Health, Sohail Bhatti to host this last press conference of the working week.

Let me start by giving you the updated statistics on the spread of the Coronavirus, Covid 19 in our Community.

- 1) Total Tested: 374
- 2) Results Pending: 137
- 3) Results Received: 237
- 4) Negative Results: 177
- 5) Confirmed Cases: 55
- 6) Recovered Cases: 14
- 7) Active Cases: 41

Unfortunately, it is my duty to inform you that one of the positive cases was a member of the staff of the Elderly Residential Services at Mount Alvernia.

This nurse had not been working at the site for a week and was identified and tested early on because of the very strict protocols in place, which include taking the temperature of staff regularly.

The nurse has only been working on one floor which is totally isolated and contained.

The staff member is recovering well and we wish them and all other individuals who have contracted the virus a full and speedy recovery, of course.

There is no evidence of COVID like infections in any of the residents.

Susan Vallejo who manages ERS is one of our most experienced nurse managers and is well known for her professionalism and dedication to the welfare of the patients of ERS.



She is responsible for ensuring the most stringent of safety protocols.

Therefore, we can be as sure as we can be that all residents are absolutely safe with no danger of any cross infection.

Yesterday we received notification that there was a sick crew member on board the cruise liner Marella Dream which is laid up on the Eastern anchorage within British Gibraltar Territorial Waters.

We were told that the crew member had been on board the vessel for over 28 days and that it appeared unlikely that he was infected with COVID 19 virus. We were also told that his symptoms were consistent, however with a COVID 19 infection and that he would have to be treated as a COVID 19 case.

Sadly, we understand that the crew member passed away whilst still on board the vessel.

We are advised that if this is a COVID 19 case there may well be others on board infected with the virus. Therefore, acting on public health advice, we will not be allowing the body to be disembarked and will be asking the vessel to leave British Gibraltar Territorial Waters.

This is of course the last day of a rather difficult working week.

We are coming to the end of the fourth full day of social lockdown in Gibraltar.

We are coming to the end of almost the second week of the lockdown of our over 70s.

I want to start this afternoon by saying that we understand how difficult this lockdown is.

We have put in place extraordinary measures which limit your civil liberties because of the extraordinary issues that are in play.

Every decision we have taken has been taken in an effort to save lives.

So please, do not think that the rules are there to be broken.

The rules are there to be observed.

Today, with the Covid 19 Exco Group we have determined that the rules will continue in place.

We will review that decision again on Monday in the Cabinet and in the Covid 19 Exco.

I will also be discussing progress on this and other aspects of the crisis with the Leader of the Opposition, with whom I have remained in daily contact.

I very much doubt that things will change between now and then.



I fully expect that the rules will continue to apply for all of next week.

Additionally, the Minister for Civil Contingencies has been asked this afternoon by the Commissioner of Police to consider introducing fixed, on the spot, penalties for a breach of the rules of social lockdown.

That is an issue which we will have to consider very carefully indeed.

We do not want to have to tighten the terms of the lockdown any further.

We do not want to make things harder.

But if the rules are not observed, we will have no choice but to do so.

And unfortunately, our information is that people continue to be out and about, many times unnecessarily.

We have made allowance for people to be out in exceptional circumstances, to enable you and your children to exercise, for example

But, people who are over 70 most certainly should not be out because they are in the vulnerable age group.

Please understand that we have introduced these measures for a reason; for your protection and the protection of your families and to relieve the pressure on the GHA.

SO PLEASE HELP US TO SLOW DOWN THIS VIRUS.

AND PLEASE COOPERATE WITH US BECAUSE WE DO NOT WANT TO HAVE TO FURTHER TIGHTEN THE TERMS OF THE LOCKDOWN.

As you know, the Gibraltar Health Authority is responsible for keeping Gibraltarians safe from disease and it needs to collect as much information as possible to steer us through this crisis. In order to do so in the best possible fashion, the GHA needs to test as high a proportion of the population of Gibraltar for Coronavirus as possible, to assess the prevalence of the virus in the population.

Some of us will therefore, be receiving phone calls from the GHA over coming days, asking that we participate in the survey.

We need you to cooperate as we try to have as wide as possible a random test of this community of Covid 19.

The caller will explain the procedure fully, but the aim is to make it as easy as possible to participate. It is extremely important to co-operate fully, as the information gathered will be crucial for the GHA to assess the current situation and to plan further action.



Your result will of course be made available to each of you, if you are part of the random sample . Remember, your participation will help to save lives.

And the initiative will allow the GHA to know how far the virus has already spread in our community and enable us to plan how best to deal with it going forward. If you receive a phone call, please co-operate with the medical professionals and be part of Team Gibraltar in this way. This is your little bit. Be in no doubt, having this data will also help us to save lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you will all be aware of the news that the Prime Minister Boris Johnson & the Minister for Health in the United Kingdom, Matt Hancock, have both contracted #Covid19. They tested positive for the disease. On behalf of the Government and People of Gibraltar, we trust that the symptoms will pass quickly & mildly and wish all the very best to the Prime Minister and to Minister Hancock!

Some of you have very kindly asked after the Deputy Chief Minister & me, after you saw us meeting the Prime Minister in London, two Thursdays ago. Neither of us have or are displaying any symptoms of COVID19 and therefore, in line with the advice given, because our meeting was now over 15 days ago, we do not need to self-isolate or test.

But how cool is it to be able to say you are "working from home" when home is 10 Downing Street!

Anyway, in respect of the BEAT COVID Measures for business, I am very pleased to see that a very large number of businesses have already started to apply for the relief for their employees.

The sooner businesses apply, the sooner we will be able to process applications.

In respect of these measures, I can confirm we have received representations from the Chamber and the Federation in respect of some businesses in the excluded sectors.

We will be reviewing these representations in coming days to determine whether certain businesses should be included or excluded and whether the sectors should change.

Separately, seeing the forms already coming in, we can see how this will help genuine, working people in the way that we consider it appropriate when we agreed this measure with CELAC and with the Opposition.

We can also see, already however, attempts at abuse that we will not tolerate.

And I must say I have been very, very disappointed that many people have registered their children last week for the support of the Department of Education with schooling.

Last Friday we had 1,332 children registered.

And yet, this week we have had a lot less children, despite having made the necessary arrangements with teachers, food etc.

Yesterday and today the numbers are in the region of 155 children that's a tenth of the number of people registered.



We understand that circumstances change and that everyone is concerned and indeed a little afraid we fully understand that

But it is unfair not to advise the Department of Education that you do not need the service. The service is there for key staff and we wanted to extend it for others that might have needed to have that service and it's really disappointing if you registered your child and didn't send them.

I have also been very disappointed to see a case of alleged robbery from the GHA.

I respect the fact that everyone is innocent until proven guilty, but if proven guilty, this would be a very severe case of breach of trust of all of us at this difficult time in our history.

I hope it is the last such case and even low level pilfering will not occur in the GHA at this time.

Those who work in the GHA are our heroes.

They are not to be tarnished by those ad hoc instances of breach of trust.

And I want to thank all those on the front line in the GHA and the law enforcement agencies for the work that they are doing.

They are the ones we are relying on to get us through in respect of this difficult time.

From the political government, from all Members of Parliament, from all the rest of the public sector and all of the People of Gibraltar, I send our front-line GHA and law enforcement staff our sincere thanks.

Pursuant to our request for Military Assistance to the Civilian Authorities, a MACA request as it's known, which has now been approved, The Royal Gibraltar Regiment and others from British Forces Gibraltar are now actively supporting the Gibraltar Health Authority in the logistics preparation in and around the Europa facility.

You will therefore see some members of the Regiment out and about assisting us and I'm wearing the tie of the Regiment today in honour of those men and women who are helping us pursuant to our MACA request

The Regiment is always there when we need it.

A part of the fabric of what Gibraltar is and representing the best of what Gibraltar is.

Thank you to the Defence Secretary, to CBF and to the Commanding Officer of the Regiment for their help.

And thank you to each and everyone of the BARBARIANS for their help.



The Royal Gibraltar Police and HM Customs are now also therefore being supported by officers of the Gibraltar Defence Police around Gibraltar in their important task of enforcing the “lockdown”.

But you must be the ones to help us the most. Every single one of you.

Don't go out tonight.

Don't break the rules.

If you do, you know what I think you are...

Anyway, tonight, why would you want to go out when you can watch Friday Night Live Safe Edition on FACEBOOK and on channel Rock 1, on Umee , Sofi and on Gibfibrespeed who are going to be running a collection for GHA and front-line staff.

And that is in addition to the excellent offer on GBC and during the day from Gibraltar Cultural Services.

Let me just tell you that from now on our press conferences will be different and you will be pleased to hear, shorter.

We have told you a lot about all the work we have done to prepare to slow the virus and to deal with the virus when it is here.

Well it's now here.

So the next press conferences will be shorter updates and we will be giving just the new material and the statistics you need to be aware of.

And also, there will be no journalists present. I would usually be very pleased at the thought of being able to carry out a press conference without journalists present.

But I must tell all members of the journalistic corps here that I will miss them a lot and we couldn't do our job without them and we couldn't deliver our message to you without them.

As in other countries, journalists will now attend virtually and will send their questions in to the press office as they watch us online.

But make sure you watch at 4pm each day or you catch up on our social media or on trusted media sources **BECAUSE WE WILL BE YOUR BEST AND MOST TRUSTED SOURCE OF NEWS** as we go into this next phase of the virus being amongst us.

WE ARE TELLING YOU EVERYTHING WE KNOW.

WE HAVE NOT

WE WILL NOT



HIDE ANYTHING FROM YOU

However harsh, you deserve and are entitled to know.

And we will be the ones to tell you.

That is our role as we discharge our first duty to you.

To protect the safety and security of our people.

I want to end by once again expressing my solidarity and the solidarity of the whole Government and the People of Gibraltar with the people of Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom and all of Europe and the whole world who are seeing their fellow countrymen and women dying of COVID.

In that respect, let's remember every day that we see the number of those infected with COVID rise, that although the numbers matter when it comes to those infected, what we are all working to do is to keep down the number that die of this disease.

It is keeping the number of deaths from COVID down that is success.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Young and old.

The best and only vaccine we have today, is you.

Your self-discipline.

Your following the rules of the social lockdown.

And your following the basic rules of hygiene.

Wash your hands.

Catch it. Bin it. Kill it.

Basic stuff.

But that is the best and only vaccine we have for now to slow the spread of the virus.