

PRESS RELEASE

No: 241/2020

Date: 30th March 2020

Chief Minister's Statement – Press Conference 30th March 2020

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen

I host today's press conference from No 6 Convent Place and I am joined by the acting Medical Director of the GHA, Dr Krish Rawal.

Today, I am going to give you updated statistics, some success stories and the effect of the lockdown and the declaration of the Major Incident.

I will then tell you about the new Florence Nightingale Ward at Europa, as well as telling you about developments at our cemetery and attendance at funerals.

Then I will tell you about a letter I have received from the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.

And finally, I will address self-administration of chloroquine and the reason why I have banned the importation of unauthorised testing kits to Gibraltar.

Let me first of all report to you the numbers of those in our community tested and infected with Covid-19.

Confirmed cases: 69

Recovered cases: 14 – but you can expect this number to be going up in coming days.

Active cases: 55

Total tests: 576

Number of negative results in past 24 hours: 77

Results pending: 201

These numbers are correct as 8:30 this morning and more updated statistics may issue shortly.



Because of the numbers of persons being diagnosed and those being admitted is rising, late on Friday I declared a MAJOR INCIDENT under the Civil Contingencies regime.

That means that all relevant departments have now stepped up to deal with the issues that arise on the structures imposed to report and communicate as a result.

That means that bronze, silver and gold levels of communication, decision making and reporting are now active.

They report direct to the Platinum level of Command, here at 6 Convent Place.

We are meeting daily at midday with the Governor, the CBF and the Deputy Chief Minister and the Minister for Civil Contingencies.

And we are in constant touch where necessary.

In fact, this process has already commenced and I declared the Major Incident on Friday to formalise this and is now working seamlessly.

I think it is worth just reflecting also, on the positive news we have had today of an elderly patient who has completely recovered from COVID-19.

This 89 year old lady is a beacon of hope.

But a hope we can aspire to replicate only if each of us comply with the rules of our lockdown.

We have been able to give this patient and all other patients all the care they need to recover because the GHA is not overwhelmed.

We need to keep it that way by ensuring that we keep the curve of infections down.

Please help us to continue to do that, however hard it may be, by keeping to the social lockdown rules.

And really, is it that hard?

Let's not be twenty-first century snowflakes.

As I said yesterday on my social media feed:

The [#EvacuationGeneration](#) went through war.

The [#ReferendumGeneration](#) went through General Franco.

The [#ClosedFrontierGeneration](#) went a through siege.

All we have to go through is our Netflix collections!



Or indeed our very full pantries and kitchen cupboards!

So let's not pretend that this is harder than it is and let's just keep going.

Already today, in the Covid Exco we have considered the possibility of seeking Cabinet approval for the police to have powers to impose fixed penalty notices.

We have decided not to do so at this stage.

But we have asked for the necessary legislation to be drafted, should such powers become a necessary addition to the arsenal of our police.

For now, please help our Police Officers, our Customs Officers, our GDP officers, all working together, to help our GHA, by following instructions and complying with the rules of our social lockdown.

I also want to recognise the concerns of those who are pregnant.

We can see that there are some apparently conflicting statements out there and we want you to know that we will never put you at risk.

Dr Rawal will say more about this during the course of his intervention.

Today, we can see that the numbers of people tested is also up.

The capacity to test at Rooke is now established.

The numbers of people tested as required because of symptoms will now be on the increase.

Additionally, the number of random samples will be taken of up to 400 in our community will continue to start, as we announced last week.

Please do cooperate with us on that random sampling.

I am very happy to be able to tell you that the GHA's Europa Nightingale Facility is now able to take patients.

We will continue to work on improving that facility.

But if push had come to shove, we would have been able to take our first patients at the Nightingale Ward today.

We must congratulate ourselves on that.

Many other nations have only had their field hospitals ready AFTER they needed them.



We have it ready in good time.

In this respect, I want to thank everyone who has helped to develop the field hospital in record time.

There are too many to mention – all led by Minister Sam Sacramento and Ivor Lopez as the Civil Contingencies Coordinator.

Stuart Bensadon, in particular, has handled logistics as if he were Gibraltar's own quartermaster.

GJBS and British Forces Gibraltar and the Regiment have helped.

And of course the GHA who have been involved in turning Europa into the additional Ward of St Bernard's it will need to be.

So thanks also to Paul Balban to Dr Rawal and their teams for this.

And Dr Cassaglia who will lead the Nightingale Ward facility.

Thanks also to John Cortes and Sohail Bhatti and his team for their insistence on the requirements to be met.

And also almost ready are the first set of niches at the cemetery.

GJBS have done a magnificent job in preparing these areas in record time.

Let's hope we never have to use them, but we have to be ready.

Additional works are being undertaken this week, with all works hopefully concluded by the end of next weekend.

We are also looking at changing our laws to issue electronic death certificates.

Finally, in this respect, I have to advise you that we have determined that funerals should only be attended by first degree relatives of the deceased.

That is to say, the parents, if relevant, children or siblings of the deceased.

Funerals – like masses and other religious worship – are areas where the virus can spread all too easily.

To all those I have not mentioned, sincere thanks also.

But please realise that these press conferences are not Oscar acceptance speeches and I cannot spend the afternoon with lists of thank yous.

I must however thank the many volunteers and benefactors who continue supporting us.



I will ensure all are properly thanked when the time comes.

One person who I must single out for specific thanks today is the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.

Mr Johnson has written to me to offer the full support of the UK Government in our fight against Coronavirus Covid-19.

The letter, which I received on Saturday, begins with a pledge from Mr Johnson that '[the UK] are committed to standing with [us] and supporting [us] during this difficult time.'

The Prime Minister goes on to explain that, despite some inflexible EU regulations, the Secretary of State for International Trade has accelerated the delivery of additional supplies of Personal Protective Equipment to Gibraltar.

The letter also notes that Spain has agreed not to hinder the delivery of this equipment, something of which we were already aware from our direct contacts already with the Spanish administration.

In terms of the economic impact of the current crisis, the Prime Minister states in his letter that he wants 'to offer clear and unequivocal reassurance to [me] that [the UK] will support the Government of Gibraltar as [we] manage these challenging economic consequences.'

The Prime Minister goes on to say that he is pleased to hear that British Forces Gibraltar are providing military assistance to the Government of Gibraltar and he notes that the Governor 'will provide every possible support in confronting the impact of this crisis.'

In that respect I should just reflect to you how helpful Governor Pyle and his team and CBF Henry at British Forces Gibraltar and his team are being with every possible eventuality.

Mr Johnson also advises me that the UK will consider how best it could provide further support if Gibraltar had a serious need for additional healthcare staff.

The Prime Minister's letter concludes with the following words,

'We are facing difficult times ahead; I wanted to end by sending you my personal thanks and best wishes for the task we are facing together.'

At such a critical time in Gibraltar's modern history, it is important to know that we have the Prime Minister's full support.

His pledge of practical and economic assistance are reassuring but, equally important, is the simple fact that, despite having contracted Coronavirus himself, he is still thinking about the needs of the people of Gibraltar.

I was very touched to receive his letter and I shall reply to tell him so on behalf of all of Gibraltar.



In respect of the economic effects of Covid, I want to acknowledge the correspondence I have received from some operators in excluded sectors.

I want all those who have written to me from the transport, distribution and pharmaceutical sectors, to know that I am considering their representations with the Financial Secretary.

I shall try to revert to each of you and to the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses in the coming hours or days.

It has also come to our attention that some people are seeking to purchase Chloroquine over the counter from some pharmacies to self-administer.

This can be toxic.

DO NOT DO THIS.

We are in touch with our pharmacies to stop this practice.

If our clinicians think you need this drug, it will be administered to you when you need it by a clinician.

DO NOT MEDICATE YOURSELVES ON THE BASIS OF WHAT YOU READ ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

YOU MAY HURT YOURSELF OR EVEN KILL YOURSELF IF YOU DO.

For similar reasons, yesterday I banned the importation of all COVID tests, except those authorised by the GHA.

We needed to do this in order to maintain quality and to stop the entry of tests that would be unreliable.

If you are falsely informed that you have or don't have COVID-19, or that you have been infected in the past, this might adversely affect compliance with social distancing measures.

That could lead to a breakdown of the objectives of our lockdown.

Ultimately, that could lead to the collapse of the GHA's capacity and unnecessary suffering and deaths of people.

Finally, tomorrow evening at 9.30pm I will be on GBC Television for the quarterly "Direct Democracy".

You will be able to ask me questions on this and any other subjects.

For now, please remember, to stay home.

If you are not at home, ask yourself if you really need to be out to work, exercise or shop.



And wash your hands often.

If you are not tired of washing your hands, you are not washing them often enough.

And if you sneeze or cough, CATCH IT, BIN IT and KILL IT.

That is how we slow the virus.

That is how we flatten the rate of infections.

That is how we help the GHA to cope

That is how the GHA will have the resources to treat all patients needing their care.

And that is how we save lives.

Thank you very much indeed.

I will now hand you over to Dr Rawal who will address issues relating to the Gibraltar Health Authority directly.

ENDS