



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Chief Minister's Script – COVID-19 Press Conference**

Good afternoon

Welcome all to another COVID-19 related press conference from No 6 Convent Place.

Before I start to address you on the concerns the Government has this week, I want to share with you today's statistical data in respect of the spread of CORONAVIRUS through our Community.

Gibraltar has now carried out 63,113 tests for COVID-19.

That is twice our population.

Today, the number of active cases detected is 114 all of whom are residents.

Unfortunately, 14 of those are residents of Elderly Residential Services.

The day-on-day increase in the numbers of cases is 9 new positives today.

And 15 persons have recovered overnight.

8 people are at the Victoria Ward at St Bernard's Hospital.

1 person is at the CCU at St Bernard's Hospital.

The GHA is coping with the persons needing its care this week.

Those numbers make the total number of cases detected in Gibraltar since the start of the pandemic, 679, an increase of 71 since I addressed you last week.

A ten percent increase and an average of 10 cases a day.

Incredibly, in global terms, last Tuesday the total number of infections I reported to you was 40m around the world.

This week, seven days on, we are at just shy of 44m cases globally.



A global increase also of ten percent of infections again in just seven days.

Let's be clear – this is getting worse before it is going to get any better.

But better it will get if we ensure that we follow rules and stick together throughout this pandemic.

And that is the reason that the Cabinet and the Platinum COVID Command have asked that I should address you again today.

Last week, Gibraltar remained on the safe travel corridor for the United Kingdom.

We must ensure that we do everything possible not to jeopardise that corridor by any suggestion that Gibraltar is in any way failing to address the increase in numbers of persons infected in Gibraltar.

Additionally, on Sunday, we saw the Spanish Government once again declare a state of emergency.

In Spain, the regional governments will have the power to determine many of the measures that will apply during the periods of the state of emergency that may last up to 6 months.

We must also ensure that we do everything possible to ensure that passage across the frontier is not restricted as a result of any suggestion that Gibraltar is in any way failing to address the increase in numbers of persons infected in Gibraltar.

And we must equally ensure that we are putting in place measures to protect ourselves against the unchecked arrival of the infection from the United Kingdom or Spain.

And we must do so in a way that does not amount to a restriction of movement into Gibraltar.

We will therefore introduce the following systems in coming days and weeks:

Firstly, in working to establish the prevalence of the virus coming in from Spain, we will randomly test cross-frontier workers as they enter or leave Gibraltar.

These tests will obviously not be compulsory.

But they will be a part of our public health surveillance measures and will involve those who are entitled to GHA care.

This facility will not be at the frontier but a little distance away from it in order not to create any unnecessary queues.

Secondly, in providing further comfort to the United Kingdom in respect of the maintenance of the travel corridor, we are now looking at the introduction of mechanisms for the testing of passengers making their way to the United Kingdom.

This will be designed to ensure that those passengers that have infection do not travel.



Passengers will also be able to take advantage of rapid testing on disembarkation.

A fee will be payable for these tests.

Without them, a short period of quarantine may be required.

This service will only be available to those who are about to or have just travelled through the airport.

Through both measures, we will be able to enhance our scrutiny of infection and quickly limit its spread.

In fact, as you will be aware we are already testing visitors from Morocco and other designated countries and all passengers already have to fill in our online passenger locator form.

Last week, when I addressed you, I set out two strands of restrictions.

The first were our strong recommendations.

The second were legislative measures.

I want to thank the over 70 who have, as a rule, very faithfully heeded the Government's strong recommendations.

I value the fact that the over 70s have appreciated the Government's recommendations were designed primarily to protect them as well as to protect the GHA and the rest of the Community.

As ever, our elders led the way in wisdom and responsibility.

I cannot say the same about the rest of us.

One of the key factors I addressed you on was the **STRONG RECOMMENDATION** that masks should be used in the area of Main Street and Irish Town.

In fact, the data that we have from the Royal Gibraltar Police suggests that the amount of people taking on the advice on using masks in the area of Main Street on Saturday was 20% or just one fifth of those in the area.

On Monday a mere 13% were complying with our **STRONG ADVICE**.

For that reason, the Government has no choice but to now legislate to make mask use in the area of Main Street, John Macintosh Square, Irish Town, and Engineers Lane, Governor's Street, Town Range, Casemates and the lanes connecting these, compulsory by law.

I genuinely wished to avoid this.

But the advice we have suggests that those areas where people can accumulate.



We are also advised that mask use depletes the viral load of the virus transmitted and received.

For those reasons, we have agreed to make mask use compulsory in these areas.

Notices setting out the area of compulsory use of masks will be prominently deployed.

As expected Chatham Counterguard remains the busiest of all our leisure areas at weekends in particular.

Occupancy in external areas has decreased significantly after my announcement last week, with a consequent decrease in the numbers of persons passing through.

I again want to thank the operators of establishments in this area for their cooperation with the authorities.

It was notable, however, that at the end of the evening on Friday patrons were not dispersing from the area.

As a result, although no new restrictions will be applied to the area, a new legal rule against loitering in the area between 11pm and 1am will apply each Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

This will assist police officers in the execution of their duties who are moving people on.

In the next weeks, I expect to meet both the Gibraltar Catering Association and the Chatham Counterguard Hospitality pressure groups.

We will of course try to work with them in respect of the issues that the new restrictions put in place last week give rise to.

I can imagine I am not exactly popular with them right now!

But we need to be realistic, look around Europe and understand what we are living through once again.

There is an alternative to the restrictions that we are bringing in.

It is called a lockdown and a curfew.

It is precisely to avoid these options that we are layering restrictions on our businesses in Gibraltar which I fully recognise are uncomfortable.

But the alternative is just to totally close down some of our businesses.

And we are working very hard to try to avoid that at all costs.

Additionally, we are monitoring very closely the effect of the reduction of maximum numbers at restaurant tables and the maximum number of people who are able to gather at any one time.



We will have a better indication next week, after 14 days of operation of these new numbers, whether or not those restrictions are working.

If necessary we will reduce those numbers further next week.

The fact is that we are seeing curfews for the first time in Europe since the end of the second world war or the end of dictatorships in some countries.

But we do not want to have to move down that route in Gibraltar.

We do NOT want to move to curfew our people for limited benefit.

In this respect, young people hold the key.

Please remember that it is illegal to consume alcohol in any public place outside of licensed premises after 11pm.

That prevents young people from gathering outside in any numbers to drink 'botellón' style.

By avoiding that, we will not have a reason to impose a curfew.

Believe me, I know you may think I am just a killjoy.

The Grinch that stole the weekends and Halloween!

There is nothing I want to do less than continue to impose restrictions.

We do so very, very reluctantly.

But we have to.

So please follow the rules as the best antidote to our having to impost even more stricter measures going forward!

And in respect of the world of work, I repeat my call to all OFFICE WORKERS.

Work from home every day that you can please.

Again, we do not want to require you to work from home by law if we can avoid it.

We want you to take that step for yourself responsibly.

Anybody in the legal profession, in accountancy, in gaming or insurance.

In every industry where you spend most of your time in front of a screen – do it from home if you can.

Ask yourself if you need to go in to work.

You can avoid one of the main vectors if you work from home if you can.



I want to turn now to matters related to the Gibraltar Health Authority.

As I have told you, the GHA is coping well right now with the numbers of infected persons needing its care.

I am, nonetheless, happy to be able to report to you that after my instruction last week the Nightingale Ward at Europa is now on just 24 hours notice to re-open if necessary.

I am also pleased to be able to report to you that the United Kingdom Government has agreed to supply Gibraltar, and the other Overseas Territories, with the COVID-19 vaccine that it will be procuring.

This once again demonstrates the UK's continued commitment to support Gibraltar in these times of adversity.

Already, early reports suggest that the Oxford vaccine reacts well in the elderly, providing the necessary antibodies, although it is still very early days yet.

In respect of the elderly, let me give you details of COVID-19 positive residents at the John Mackintosh Wing.

We currently have 14 patients positive for Covid-19, all at the JMW 3rd floor.

It has been 9 days since the first 5 tested positive.

It has been 5 days since another 8 tested positive.

1 resident is on day 2 after detection.

The age range is from 64 to 101 and the mean age is 86 years.

13 are female patients and 1 is a male patient.

The total frailty scores of the residents range in question between 6 to 8, the mean is 7 (severely frail).

9 of these residents suffer from dementia.

Currently all of the residents are clinically stable without a fever and 5 of them have an oxygen requirement of 2 litres.

They all continue to eat and drink and have not developed a delirium.

There are 7 further residents in isolation.

1 at Mount Alvernia, 3 at Bella Vista and 3 at the Trafalgar Wing of Hillside.

In total in the ERS, GHA run facilities there are 2 positive staff members and another 19 members of staff are self-isolating.



At Mount Alvernia, one non-clinical member of staff has tested positive and at Cochrane ward, one clinical member of staff is positive.

In the ERS, Meddoc-run facilities there are 12 positive clinical staff and 29 members of staff are in self-isolation.

I am giving you this very full detail to ensure that people can see that we are hiding nothing.

We are giving you all the details, just as we did in the spring.

We are pretty certain, from the contact tracing done that the ERS infections came in via a visitor to the John Mac Wing.

The decision has been made by the clinical team to move the remaining residents of the John Mackintosh Home who are still negative out of the premises to safeguard and quarantine them.

These negative residents were transferred on Friday night to Bellavista's 3rd floor.

Residents' next of kin are informed of all relevant issues regarding their relatives, including positive diagnostics for COVID-19.

That is why it is so important – however painful – that we should shut down our facilities at ERS for visitors.

Additionally, and in view of the rising numbers both in the ERS and in Gibraltar as a whole, as from Wednesday 28th

October that is to say tomorrow all Day Centre activity at Bellavista will also be temporarily discontinued.

This is in order to mitigate the risk of an outbreak of COVID-19 amongst Day Centre users, who come from different family bubbles and where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

The Joint Memory Clinic will continue with its activity.

The Outreach clinic will be reinforced in order to support those service users and family members at home.

These measures are temporary and are to be kept under constant review, with the objective of minimising the length of time that the Day Centre service will be unavailable.

The Influenza vaccine for people aged over 65 has now arrived in Gibraltar and is available at the Primary Care Centre.

The Influenza vaccination programme for adults over the age of 65 will be delivered at the PCC from Monday to Friday, from 13:00 hours to 17:45.

Appointments must be pre-booked by calling 20052441 between 13:00 to 15:00.



The vaccine that is administered to people 65 years is a different one, it is called a Trivalent Vaccine, which gives broader protection to the elderly and most vulnerable.

Trivalent protects against three different viruses – two influenza A viruses and one influenza B virus.

This is different to the Quadrivalent flu vaccine that is already being administered.

Arrangements are being made by the GHA to make these available to government tenants who live in the purpose built flats for the elderly and the Trivalent flu vaccine will be administered by the district nurses.

The District nurses will be liaising with the wardens to ensure a robust programme is in place to maintain social distancing.

The GHA's flu vaccination programme for 2021 flu season has been extended this year, with more groups eligible to receive flu vaccine than in previous years.

This is because COVID-19 is likely to be in co-circulation with flu, it is vitally important therefore to protect those at risk of flu, who are also those most vulnerable to hospitalisation as a result of COVID-19.

Members of the public are strongly encouraged to take the flu vaccine and make an appointment, particularly those who are over the age of 65 or are in any other way particularly vulnerable.

Finally, please do not trick or treat this Halloween.

And please do not plan any Guy Fawkes parties.

The Government's message this Halloween is that parties and trick or treating should not take place in order to stop the further spread of COVID-19 in Gibraltar.

The mixing of persons and movement door to door, particularly of children, can spread the virus and this presents a risk to the elderly and vulnerable members of our community.

Public Health advice strictly remains to keep social distance and to avoid unnecessary contact with people outside of existing bubbles.

Restaurants and bars are reminded that they should not host any organised Halloween parties either.

Members of the public, and particularly parents, are urged to ensure that their children observe the advice on this issue and avoid placing weaker members of our Community at risk.

As the numbers of active cases in our Community has risen, we must take care to protect our neighbours, our health services and indeed ourselves.

The best advice this Halloween is to stay in the home and enjoy the day with family.



As you have heard from me repeatedly today, our aim is to avoid a second lockdown.

We want to avoid curfews or other, tighter restrictions.

But to do these things we need YOUR help.

Please follow the rules we are setting out.

We are doing so in order to balance your civil liberties with your health.

It is not an easy balance to do.

History will judge whether we got the balance right.

These measures are undoubtedly uncomfortable.

But no more so than the evacuation was – and that lasted six years or more for some.

Or the closure of the frontier, which lasted 13 years.

Or even the lockdown that we went through in April.

So let us work together to keep Gibraltar safe, to suppress the curve of infections.

And let us keep going.

Together, we will get through these inconveniences and we will smile again, we trick or treat again and we will burn a Guy again.

Next year.

Thank you very much for listening this afternoon I will now take questions from assembled colleagues from the media here at No 6 Convent Place.

ENDS