

# From 11 October, an emergency situation is declared in Latvia for three months

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From Monday, 11 October, an emergency situation is declared in Latvia for three months in order to stop the rapid spread of Covid-19 infection, not to overburden health care system and save as many lives as possible. The depletion of health care resources, the large number of new cases of Covid-19 in recent days, the low vaccination coverage and the forecasts of epidemiological experts are all a set of circumstances that force the Government to immediately decide on strict safety measures throughout Latvia.

All citizens will have to return to more widespread use of face masks, as this is one of the key measures for epidemiological safety. On 11 October, the requirement for wearing face masks indoors for both residents who are vaccinated and recovered from Covid-19 and those unvaccinated will take effect. A properly used mask covers both the nose and the mouth.

Considering that the on-site education is a priority for the Government and the society, students will continue to attend school; however, everyone will be required to wear properly used face masks indoors (except in pre-schools). Routine Covid-19 screening will continue to be maintained in schools at least once a week. However, on-site interest education will not take place for non-vaccinated persons during the emergency situation, except within one class or group and individually. There will be no restrictions on the interest education for vaccinated and recovered persons.

All employees in the public administration and municipalities will have to work remotely, but if the job responsibilities do not allow it, in person only with a vaccination or recovery certificate and in some cases - with a negative test. The employee will be obliged to start vaccination no later than within 10 days if the employer has determined that the duties are to be performed only with a vaccination or recovery certificate. The certificate must be obtained by 15 November. Also employees of the private sector has an obligation to vaccinate. In addition, it is strongly recommended that remote work is also implemented in the private sector as an important safety measure, where the nature of the work permits it so.

In order to limit the number of physical contacts between people throughout society and avoid unnecessary gathering, from 11

October services will only be available and provided in an epidemiologically safe environment. Therefore, everyone must have a valid Covid-19 certificate, wear properly used face masks and a smaller number of people will be allowed to gather in a room at the same time, as well as 15 m<sup>2</sup> of the area of the premises must be provided per person. Services related to indoor entertainment and attractions will not be allowed to operate. However, some services could still be provided on an individual basis.

In the field of culture, epidemiological safety requirements mostly involve operating in the "green" - safe - mode, but with stricter requirements (face masks, distance, fewer people, etc.). The new conditions will enter into force on 19 October due to a transitional period until 18 October, which is linked to previously announced events for which tickets have already been sold out.

From 11 October, unvaccinated people will have access to only the basic needs-carrying stores - food stores, pharmacies, opticians, stores selling pet food, press, hygiene products, telecommunication products and fuel retail stations. People with a vaccination or recovery certificate will also be allowed to visit other points of sales where a visitor control must be provided. In order to reduce the so-called spending of leisure time in shopping centres, it is planned to limit their activities on weekends to all residents.

In public catering, it is planned to maintain the possibility for people with a vaccination or recovery certificate to have a meal in person with a working time limit until 21:00. Meals will be available for take away for both vaccinated and non-vaccinated people.

During the emergency situation State Police in cooperation with the municipality police will primarily implement the compliance with safety measures and their control, as it has refocused its resources to ensure even stricter inspections in the areas entrusted to it. The main focus will be on the proper use of the mouth and nose covering in public places, in particular on public transport and in points of sales, as well as on compliance with gathering restrictions. The police will also strengthen the control of persons in self-isolation, as well as direct resources to the verification of interoperable certificates at the border. Increasingly, sudden large-scale inspections will also be carried out simultaneously throughout Latvia. Citizens must take into consideration that during the emergency situation, with the prevalence of Covid-19 infections rising, the intensity of police control and the frequency of penalties will increase significantly.

Unfortunately, a significant increase in Covid-19 cases is expected in our country, including an increase in the number of hospitalized patients. The information provided by the Centre of Emergency and Disaster Medicine on 7 October suggests that an average of 135 new Covid-19 patients could be hospitalized daily by 23 October, and up to 130 to 200 new patients by 30 October. As a result, between 1,300 and 1,700 patients would be in hospitals at the same time, which would put a significant strain on the healthcare system.

In the coming weeks, the ability of hospitals to admit new patients is endangered, including the cases of serious injuries, road accidents, complications during childbirth and other cases not related to the Covid-19 virus. Residents should be aware that emergency medical teams may be late to calls in emergency situations or refuse the visit. Due to the overload, the hospitals closest to the people on a daily basis may not be available and one might have to go to another city to the next free medical institution.

The possibility of setting up "field hospitals" and seeking foreign assistance in the event of a deterioration is not ruled out.

In the coming days and weeks, decisive and responsible action of every resident of Latvia, complying with the increased safety measures imposed in the country, is crucial.

At the same time, vaccination against Covid-19 remains the main national strategy to defeat the virus. Thanks to 46% of the inhabitants of Latvia who have fully completed the vaccination course against Covid-19, part of the society is already protected. The Government and everyone in this country can be grateful for the responsible action towards their own and other people's health and safety. However, in order to slow down the spread of the virus, faster and more decisive action is required from the part of the population that has remained hesitant and postponed vaccination.

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