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National Covid-19 Task Force



Press release
Changes in COVID-19 protocols
August 30, 2021

During an outbreak of any infectious disease, the incubation period of that disease is the yardstick. An average incubation period of COVID-19 is five to seven days. Which is why we consider the multiples of seven, 14 or 21-day timeframe for any COVID-19 related interventions.

It has been two weeks since the last outbreak in the communities of Phuentsholing and Samtse. Moreover, close to 8,000 tests carried out in Phuentsholing alone in the last 15 days did not reveal any positive case in the community. A few that were reported were either the travellers or primary contacts in the quarantine centres.

While considerations could have come after two weeks of second nationwide vaccination, it was complicated by the local outbreaks in Phuentsholing and Samtse then.

The communities are now “unlocked” and not a single case of COVID-19 was detected despite completion of 14 days. Moreover, more than 90 percent of the residents of Phuentsholing and pockets of Samtse have been vaccinated, which could also be attributed to non-detection of a case in the community.

So far, 65 percent of the total population have completed their vaccination and 76.5 percent of the total population have received the first dose. In the last one month, 79,332 tests have been conducted across the nation, which includes the enhanced surveillance of frontliners and students.

Taking confidence from all these findings, while also weighing the growing risks globally, we are happy to announce the following changes in the COVID-19 protocols **with immediate effect**.

1. The three weeks mandatory quarantine period for all travellers coming into the country will be reduced to two weeks.

The Ministry of Health has been advised to re-design and decide the testing strategy to heightened health surveillance during the two weeks in the quarantine. The surveillance team has also been advised to devise the testing pattern and facilitate exit of those who have completed two weeks quarantine, if eligible.

The two-week quarantine will be applied to all inbound travellers, irrespective of vaccination status and country of origin.

2. The existing business operation time will be extended from 9pm to 10pm for low risk areas and from 8pm to 9pm in high risk areas. The business outlets are reminded to maintain highest level of COVID-19 protocols. However, everyone must practice the crowd size of 25 or 50 percent, whichever is minimum.



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3. All indoor and outdoor sports will be allowed in full strength throughout the country. Tournaments and matches are allowed without spectators but those in the high risk areas will require clearance from local taskforces.

The organisers must enforce all COVID-19 norms and dissuade any sort of gathering of non-players in the vicinity at all times.

Match organisers are to confirm vaccination status of the players and disallow participation of those who have not taken the vaccine despite being eligible. It is only reasonable and professional to do so, given the risks involved for the individual as well as other players.

4. Relaxations will be further reviewed and considered upon the completion of vaccination of children from 12 to 17 years, which is due by mid September. Announcements will be made accordingly. In the event of any indication of local transmission, these changes in COVID-19 protocols will be immediately withdrawn.

However, it is important to note that we are taking measured, conservative steps without compromising the benefits we have accrued until now to secure our nation from the pandemic.

The changes are being introduced at a time when some countries are imposing more restrictions amid increasing spread of the disease. We are able to do so with due veneration to His Majesty's leadership and concerted efforts of all frontline workers and solidarity of the people of Bhutan.

Here, we also thank all those who came forward to make the nationwide vaccination campaigns a success and well-wishers who were part of Bhutan's COVID-19 prevention efforts.

As we intensify the surveillance and continue to monitor the situation closely, we urge everyone to observe basic COVID-19 health instructions of wearing masks, hand washing and avoiding crowd with sincerity and diligence. With the emergence of newer viral variants, each more aggressive than the other, this is not the time to let down the guard. Please take care of yourself and your loved ones.

National COVID-19 Taskforce Secretariat