

Media Release

Date: 19 March 2020

COVID-19: Schools to close for extended Easter holiday

It has been decided by the Director of Public Health that schools, colleges and pre-schools will close from Monday 23 March for an extended Easter holiday period.

However, provision will be made for the childcare of children of key workers and children with special educational needs. Details of these arrangements will be announced tomorrow (Friday 20th March), but for now all parents should plan for the potential that all schools, colleges and early years providers will close on Monday.

The decision follows a change in circumstances last night for Bailiwick samples being tested in the UK, which due to pressures it is facing cannot continue to guarantee the same turnaround time for results. There is now a need to further assess the UK's public announcement in relation to its policy for testing and its impact on our ability to assess the situation locally.

A key focus for the Bailiwick has been to introduce on-island testing and this work has been progressing at pace. It is now thought this can be put in place during this period of education pause, which could enable the full re-opening of schools as soon as possible after the Easter break.

Director of Public Health, Dr Nicola Brink said:

'This is effectively a period of pause for education in the Bailiwick while we put necessary measures in place. The UK's circumstances have changed and that could lead to a level of uncertainty not previously present for us, for example about the speed in which results will be returned. We are taking necessary steps to prevent that uncertainty, if it materialises, making it more difficult for us to identify any community seeding if it occurs.

'Fortunately we believe the ability to test locally is nearly here. This will not only mean we can continue assessing the rate of spread of coronavirus in our community, it will give us the ability to carry out more tests, more quickly, improving the data we use to make decisions. I would again urge all islanders to focus on maintaining social distancing wherever possible, as this is an essential part of limiting the spread.'

When Guernsey is able to carry out its own testing, work will be done to quickly determine the extent to which 'community seeding' is taking place - in other words, how much coronavirus spreads from one person in the Bailiwick to another, as opposed to cases coming into the Island from other jurisdictions.

The travel restrictions which have come into effect today, where people who arrive in the Bailiwick by law have to self-isolate for 14 days, and the guidance on social distancing and other ways of reducing contact mean there is a reasonable chance that the Bailiwick will be able to remain in the 'containment' phase and schools can resume as soon as possible after the scheduled Easter break. However, it is possible that if the data shows community seeding is occurring, a decision will have to be made to keep schools closed.

Deputy Gavin St Pier, Chair of the Civil Contingencies Authority said:

'While it frustrating to find ourselves in this situation, we cannot simply rely on others and must introduce on-island testing as quickly as possible. I'm very hopeful that the decision to begin the Easter break early is not the beginning of a longer term closure of schools, but we also have to be realistic that it's a real possibility. As is occurring on an almost daily basis, we have found the circumstances around us have changed but, again, we've considered the options quickly and carefully and made what we are sure is the right decision at this stage for our community.'

Further information will be provided to all schools, colleges and early years providers as soon as possible.

Ends

Notes to Media

Please contact Joel de Woolfson
joel.dewoolfson@gov.gg