

## President of the Committee *for* Policy & Resources

### Statement from Deputy Gavin St Pier at Media Briefing - 2.30pm, 17 March 2020

I will make a short opening Statement, followed by Heidi and update from Dr Brink before we invite questions. I must credit the Singaporean Prime Minister, much of whose language I've ruthlessly plagiarised from a speech he gave a few days ago, because it so well describes our own position.

Much credit and thanks has rightly been given to Dr Brink and her team. But this is no longer a Public Health led matter; this is a whole island challenge, led by government, supported by the community and advised by Public Health. The change in our line-up before you today consciously reflects that shift. And I want to take this opportunity to thank the 100's across the whole public service who have worked, quite literally around the clock, to gear us up, so we can support our colleagues in health services who are about to put through their paces in the weeks ahead.

At 740pm last night, we had had 157 tests with only one positive. We have no evidence, yet, of community seeding of the infection, which is great news. It means we remain in the 'contain' phase of our plan, which is to isolate cases, undertake contact tracing, and quarantine the close contacts.

At the same time, all around us, the number of cases is rising rapidly and Europe is now the epicentre of this pandemic.

This means that the World Health Organisation assesses that many countries will now see full blown outbreaks, with sustained community transmission, such as happened in South Korea and Italy. This is why we are seeing increasingly draconian measures being taken in jurisdictions around us. And unlike SARS, this outbreak will continue for some time – weeks or months in its initial phase, but may be a year or more overall.

The WHO identified one key reason for the rapid spread: many countries had not taken the situation seriously enough – what the WHO has called “alarming levels of inaction”. Here in Guernsey, Dr Brink and her team have all along taken COVID-19 with the utmost seriousness.

But despite that, we now face the gravest public health crisis since 1944. We cannot hope to keep the infection entirely out of our community. That is totally unrealistic, given the pandemic nature of this infection. We cannot completely cut ourselves off from the outside world forever. But we have effectively imposed a temporary travel ban which, as previously anticipated, I am now announcing that we are further tightening. From 0001 on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March, any entrant to the Bailiwick from **anywhere** outside, including Jersey and the UK, will be subject to a 14 day period of mandatory self-isolation, subject to limited exceptions. Dr Brink will explain the rationale and evidence base for the imposed travel restrictions, the timing of its introduction and the basis of the necessary exceptions.

I am also announcing today – again as pre-warned last week – the imminent intention by the Civil Contingencies Authority to adopt Emergency Powers Regulations. Deputy Soulsby will outline what these will do.

What else must we do? First, because COVID-19 will be with us for a *long* time, there are **baseline** things that **every** islander must now get used to: like practising frequent and effective handwashing, adopting new social greetings and discouraging large gatherings; and generally, maintaining some physical distance from one another, especially for those over 65 with underlying health conditions. These measures alone will reduce the number of cases by 60%. That is why they are so important and everyone young and old **must** comply. It is not about protecting you, it's about protecting others.

Second, we need to prepare for our own peak in COVID-19 cases. If we have even moderately large numbers, with finite on-island resources, our health system will quite quickly become overwhelmed. The consequence of that is more individuals will die than would be the case if they could all receive the best available treatment. But we now know that the majority of patients, in fact 80% of them, only experience mild symptoms and can very satisfactorily recover in comfort at home. The ones that are most at risk are the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions, like high blood pressure or lung problems. So we will only hospitalise the more serious cases. This way, we can focus resources on the seriously ill, speed up our response time, and hopefully, minimise the number of deaths.

If there is a peak, we will probably also need **additional social distancing measures**. These will be temporary like closing Beau Sejour, the schools, restaurants, bars and other public spaces or compulsory home working. These measures, if imposed, will be extra “brakes” to slow down transmission of the virus, prevent our healthcare system from being overwhelmed, and help bring the numbers back down. After the situation improves, we can ease off and go back to the baseline precautions.

But let me emphasise this: today, the situation in Guernsey remains under control. We are not locking down our community like the French, Spanish or Italians quite simply because we don't need to – yet. What we are doing now, is planning ahead for some of these more stringent measures and preparing islanders for when we actually **do** need to deploy them – and islanders should assume that, at the right time, we will need to. It is quite possible that we will see school and other closures in the UK, Jersey or other jurisdictions and it is understandable but inappropriate for our community to be looking to other places as a guide for what our island needs at this stage in the disease's progression. With the internet, it's hard, but islanders really must ignore what's happening elsewhere and rely on gov.gg as their source of reliable information and guidance. Please do not spread gossip or information sourced from social media. It helps no-one.

One major concern we have is the impact on our economy. Our business community is suffering big time. And so the States are working on a package of measures to assist immediate liquidity problems. I will announce this initial package in the States of Deliberation tomorrow to help businesses cash flow and keep their heads above water. And more detail and quite possibly more measures will be required in due course. I won't say any more about this today.

I am saying all this today to reassure the community that we are in control, we have a good grip and we are thinking one step ahead. We have anticipated the health service and

economic consequences and have planned accordingly. We have and will continue to make judgements which are informed by the most recent and best scientific information and evidence that Dr Brink and her team can supply. The steps we take will be proportionate and relevant to the Bailiwick's needs.

Islanders will quite understandably be anxious for themselves and their families but they need not be fearful. Most of us will be able to continue working, shopping and going out – with a very large proviso that Public Health's advice must be rigidly complied with, particularly in relation to personal hygiene – hand washing, not touching your face, 'catch it, kill it, bin it,' social distancing.

As a community we have huge resilience – and we have some tough times ahead but we will get through this. I am – as I know others are – hugely humbled and impressed by the rallying of islanders to support each other and taking a really responsible attitude by the vast majority to the public health advice that has been issued.

We will remain in this high risk state for some time to come. But there is only so much government can do to plan and prepare. The success of that plan will largely now come down to the individual actions of, quite literally, each and every member of our community to comply with the advice we have given - and will regularly update, as and when needed. The responsibility on each of us is huge. But if we all remain disciplined, follow the practical precautions to protect ourselves and our families, we will be able to keep our economy going, and maintain a semblance of new-normal daily life until the crisis is over.