

Controlled reopening of the Danish society

The gradual reopening of the Danish society continues.

As part of the efforts to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus in Denmark, the Government and the authorities have taken a number of general measures to reduce social contact, maintain social distancing and increase the effect of social distancing.

On 30 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced that the Government might commence a cautious, gradual and controlled reopening of society, provided that the population continued to observe the general recommendations on appropriate conduct and that the number of people hospitalised etc. remained stable.

It is a prerequisite of phase one of the gradual reopening of the Danish society that everybody continues to follow the directions on social distancing and good hygiene as the spread of the disease may otherwise increase rapidly and seriously challenge the healthcare capacity.

For the measures to be effective in battling COVID-19 in Denmark, every single citizen must assume responsibility to reduce social contact and maintain social distancing. This also applies among family and friends, and it is even more relevant now when the controlled reopening of the Danish society is initiated.

Phase one of the controlled reopening extended

Based on advice from the health authorities, the Government has deemed it safe from a health perspective to extend phase one of the controlled reopening of society.

The Government (the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiet)) and the Liberal Party of Denmark (Venstre), the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti), the Social Liberal Party (Det Radikale Venstre), the Socialist People's Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti), the Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten), the Conservative People's Party (Det Konservative Folkeparti), the New Right (Nye Borgerlige), the Liberal Alliance and the Alternative (Alternativet) have agreed on the following initiatives.

The parties also note that the authorities will introduce a comprehensive testing strategy for which the SSI (Statens Serum Institut) has provided a guarantee based on its professional expertise. According to this strategy, front-line workers, relatives and vulnerable groups are to be tested. Moreover, a representative sample of the Danish population is to be tested to monitor developments. Finally, the parties note that the authorities will continue their efforts to make sure that sufficient personal protective equipment is provided.

Liberal professions in which client contact cannot be avoided can reopen from 20 April 2020

- One of the measures introduced to prevent the spread of COVID-19 was a temporary ban on hairdressers and certain liberal professions, see the Executive Order Banning Large Gatherings and Banning Access to and Imposing Restrictions on Premises as a Means of Controlling COVID-19. At the same time, a temporary ban on driving lessons in driving school cars was introduced.
- These bans will be lifted as from Monday, 20 April 2020, the consequence being that business owners can now reopen their premises for customers and clients, and it will be possible to give driving lessons in driving school cars.
- A multi-sector partnership will be established for the relevant authorities, industries, trade unions and relevant organisations for the purpose of agreeing on a responsible reopening strategy.
- Enterprises comprised by the ban may find it inexpedient to open up. In that situation, enterprises previously comprised by the ban and therefore closed so far may choose to stay closed, and such enterprises will continue to receive a refund under the current scheme of up to 80 per cent of their overheads.

Liberal professions which can reopen from 20 April 2020

- Hairdressers
- Beauty parlours and massage parlours
- Body lounges
- Spa clinics
- Tattooists and body piercers
- Physiotherapists Chiropractors Occupational therapists
- Osteopaths
- Clinical dieticians
- Chiroprodists
- Opticians and optometrists
- Psychologists
- The dental field, including dental technologists, dentists and dental hygienists
- The audiology field
- Private hospitals and clinics
- Driving schools
- Other premises at which clients are offered services involving close physical contact between the service provider and the client, as well as tanning studios.

➔ Memorandum from the Ministry of Health on increased activity in the general healthcare sector and among other private healthcare providers following the announcement concerning the national health service on 13 April 2020

➔ Download the Ministry's list of liberal professions which can reopen

Reopening of courts, the Prison and Probation Service, research institutions, media content producers etc.

- The Courts of Denmark have set up emergency procedures to handle critical cases, but there is an urgent need for scheduling far more cases. The courts are therefore urged to reopen as quickly as possible to hear as many cases as possible. The Agency of Family Law (Familiieretshuset) will also open for child interviews and supervised visitation, which are very critical activities specifically for children.
- When it is deemed safe from a health perspective, the Prison and Probation Service (Kriminalforsorgen) will gradually summon offenders to start serving their prison sentences.
- Research laboratories will partially reopen to researchers and students to enable them to complete their post-doc or PhD degrees and to continue research trials and research projects that would otherwise be wasted.
- Some domestic production of Danish media content for the radio and TV channels DR and TV2 will also open up.
- A multi-sector partnership will be established for each of the above-mentioned tracks for the purpose of agreeing on a responsible reopening strategy.

Elderly and vulnerable citizens as well as marginalised young people

- Partnerships will be established across authorities, civil society, cultural institutions, private players and the public sector to develop initiatives countering loneliness and vulnerability and supporting marginalised children and young people.
- New methods will be developed to facilitate visits from family and relatives in a safe manner from a health perspective.
- The parties will discuss in detail over the next days the individual initiatives with the ministers and authorities responsible for the relevant fields.

Subsequent phases of a controlled reopening

In week 17 (20-26 April 2020), the parties will resume negotiations for the second and subsequent phases of the reopening of the Danish society to agree on an aggregate plan for finding a way out of the COVID-19 crisis. The aim is to clarify when further restrictions can be lifted and under what conditions. Assessments must be made of the health and economic perspectives of all initiatives.

The parties note that the health authorities have introduced a number of general recommendations on good hygiene, social distancing etc. However, additional initiatives may be required in certain sectors to avoid the spread of novel coronavirus. A number of multi-sector partnerships will now be established as forums to further the dialogue between authorities, relevant trade organisations and trade unions and other relevant organisations about how to reopen society in a responsible manner. The purpose of the multi-sector dialogue is to create a common understanding of the concept of reopening in a responsible manner to help the individual sectors prepare for the reopening.

Recent reopening initiatives

Day-care facilities

Day-care facilities will open as quickly as possible as from 15 April 2020 when the individual local councils consider it safe in view of the directions of the health authorities. The Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Health will issue directions for a safe reopening process taking into account the need to maintain good health at day-care facilities. Employees must follow the general recommendations of the health authorities. For further details, see the websites of the Danish Health Authority and the Ministry of Children and Education.

Elementary schools

Schools will open as quickly as possible as from Wednesday, 15 April 2020 for pupils from pre-school through fifth grades and from classes for pupils with special needs from all grades when the individual local councils consider it safe in view of the directions of the health authorities. Before- and after-school care (for pupils up to the fifth grade) will open at the same time. The Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Health will issue directions for a safe reopening process taking into account the need to maintain good health at the institutions. All pupils with high-risk family members can stay at home at the parents' choice. Employees must follow the general recommendations of the health authorities. For further details, see the websites of the Danish Health Authority and the Ministry of Children and Education.

As regards tests and examinations, the final general proficiency marks, which must be given as late in the school year as possible, will replace examination marks. The Ministry of Children and Education will lay down detailed rules.

General and vocational upper secondary education and higher education

Institutions of general and vocational upper secondary education will remain physically closed, except for students of upper secondary education in the third grade of upper secondary schools (3.g), the second grade of the higher preparatory examination course (2.hf), classes for students with an autism spectrum disorder and classes for students enrolled in vocational upper secondary education courses (EUX) who will take their school-leaving examination this summer. The Government will discuss with the other parties in Parliament how 3.g and 2.hf students can take their examinations.

Solutions have already been made for the journeyman's tests under the vocational education and training programmes. All pupils with high-risk family members can stay at home at the parents' choice. Employees must follow the general recommendations of the health authorities. For further details, see the websites of the Danish Health Authority and the Ministry of Children and Education.

Institutions of higher education will remain physically closed, except for students in the last semester of their education programmes who will become qualified to perform critical functions in the healthcare sector (including the social and healthcare training programme (SOSU)).

The private sector labour market

All private sector employers were urged on 13 March 2020 to ensure that as many employees as possible work from home etc., that physical meetings etc. are held only if absolutely necessary, and that other relevant measures are initiated to promote appropriate conduct at the workplace.

The authorities will enter into a dialogue with the relevant trade associations and trade unions about the process for letting employees who have worked from home return to the physical workplace as from Tuesday, 14 April 2020 if they can perform their work in a fully safe manner, including by maintaining the other existing measures and following the general directions for appropriate conduct, social distancing etc. The workplaces should maintain focus on flexibility by maintaining the possibility to work from home, the use of online meetings, staggered working hours etc.

Vocational training for unemployed people with a specific job opening

Unemployed people who are offered vocational training requiring attendance in person as a condition for taking up a new position will now be allowed to appear in person. Adult vocational training courses (AMU) will be opened for unemployed people who require a specific qualifying certificate to take up a new position.

More tests and new digital tracking

The authorities are currently working on upscaling the capacity for testing for the novel coronavirus to perform more offensive testing in connection with the upcoming controlled reopening of the Danish society. The tests to be performed during the initial testing phase are diagnostic tests, but concurrent efforts will be made to try out and introduce so-called immune tests, which can detect COVID-19 antibodies.

In addition to ensuring the relevant treatment of individuals, the testing scheme is also intended partly to contain the disease by diagnosing individuals for the purpose of self-isolation and by curbing the spread of the disease through early detection and partly to monitor the prevalence of the disease in society.

During the coming weeks, the health authorities will release an app intended partly to strengthen the data available to the health authorities for the ongoing surveillance of the COVID-19 pandemic and thereby provide data supporting a gradual reopening of society and partly to promote appropriate conduct among Danish citizens that will contribute to curbing the spread of the disease as society is gradually reopened.

The scheme is a voluntary scheme based on the Norwegian model, according to which citizens aged 15+ can download an app. The first version of this app is able to register any contact within a distance of one to two metres with other citizens who have downloaded the same app. The data collected may provide useful information on contact patterns. The health authorities can only use data provided by the app for monitoring the prevalence of the disease at an aggregate level by means of pseudonymised data.

Public transport

In the recent weeks of partial lockdown of the Danish society, the number of passengers using public transport has been down by more than 80 per cent. The current timetables for buses, the light rail, trains and the metro have therefore been downscaled.

A consequence of the controlled reopening of society is that the number of passengers will increase. To avoid excessive passenger density, a considerable upscaling of public transport has been made as from Tuesday, 14 April 2020 in Metropolitan Copenhagen in particular. The upscaling will involve more departures and longer trains. Users, schools and workplaces must also contribute to an even use of public transport through flexible planning. Moreover, the increased cleaning frequency on common contact surfaces in public transport means and at stations will remain at the same high level.

Extension of the measures

Temporary border control and entry restrictions

Temporary border control and entry restrictions came into effect at all Danish borders on 14 March 2020. The period of border checks, which do not usually include freight transports, has been extended until 12 May 2020.

Stricter travel advice from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has continuously changed its travel advice, but froze the breakdown of the world into red and orange areas as at 17 March 2020. Danish citizens returning from abroad are strongly urged to isolate themselves at home for two weeks and Danish citizens are advised against all but essential travel abroad at least until 10 May 2020.

Schools, educational institutions, cultural institutions, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, religious communities and recreational facilities closed

All schools were closed on 16 March 2020. Except for the above-mentioned exemptions, the period of closure will continue until 11 May 2020. The closing of schools affects all pupils in the sixths to tenth grades, continuation schools, voluntary vocational courses and other boarding schools.

Pupils and students at all public institutions of upper secondary education, courses for adult students, institutions of further education etc. have been told to stay home from school as from 13 March 2020. Except for the above-mentioned exemptions, the period of school closures will continue until 11 May 2020.

All public cultural institutions, church buildings owned by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark and all activities offered at parish halls, premises of religious communities, libraries, recreational facilities and similar indoor activities were closed down on 13 March 2020. Except for the above-mentioned exemptions, the period of closure will continue until 11 May 2020. Public service providers responsible for news coverage and incident management are exempted.

Public employees sent home (with pay)

All public employees not performing critical functions have been told to stay home from work as from 13 March 2020. The period that they are to stay at home will continue until 11 May 2020. During the coming period, some employees assigned to specific crucial tasks will be exempted from this requirement and be allowed to appear in person. Agreements to this effect must be made with the Minister for the relevant area and in consultation with the health authorities. Public employees working outdoor and having hardly any social interaction can continue to work as usual. The employees sent home must work from home as far as possible.

Events, gatherings etc. with more than 10 participants banned

On 18 March 2020, the Government ordered a temporary ban on events, activities etc. involving more than 10 people. The period of this temporary ban has been extended until 11 May 2020.

As regards large events, activities etc., the Government has extended this temporary ban until 31 August 2020.

Nightclubs, bars, restaurants, cafes etc. closed

On 18 March 2020, the Government ordered a temporary ban on nightclubs, discotheques, bars, pubs, hookah cafes etc. The period of this temporary ban will be extended until 11 May 2020.

On 18 March 2020, the Government ordered a temporary ban on dining-in service at restaurants, cafes etc. The period of this temporary ban will be extended until 11 May 2020.

Shopping centres etc. closed

On 18 March 2020, the Government ordered a temporary ban on shared indoor locations like shopping centres, department stores, shopping arcades etc. with many people. The period of this temporary ban will be extended until 11 May 2020.

Indoor sports and recreational facilities etc. closed

On 18 March 2020, the Government ordered a temporary ban on indoor sports and recreational facilities etc., including water parks, playgrounds, cinemas, theatres, fitness centres and tanning studios. The period of this temporary ban will be extended until 11 May 2020.