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Norway to lift COVID-19 restrictions gradually and cautiously

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'By working together, we have got the virus under control, and can start to lift restrictions little by little. We will do this together, cautiously, and taking our time,' said Prime Minister Erna Solberg.

Children's day care centres, primary school classes for pupils in years 1–4 and out-of-school care programmes will re-open, and towards the end of April, the Government will lift the ban on people staying at their holiday properties. Hairdressers and other businesses where there is one-to-one contact will be allowed to resume operations provided that they follow the requirements for infection control measures. The changes will be brought in gradually during April.

In addition, the Government will re-open upper secondary schools for second- and third-year pupils who are following vocational education programmes, provided that this can be done in a way that meets infection control guidelines.

Gradual introduction of changes in April

'Our goal is still to suppress the coronavirus. We can see that the steps we have taken are beginning to work. I would like to thank all of you who have made such great efforts by staying at home, keeping your distance from other people and preventing the spread of the infection. Thanks to your contributions, we can gradually ease some restrictions,' said Ms Solberg.

The Government will re-open child day care from 20 April, and by 27 April at the latest, and primary school classes for years 1–4 and out-of-school care programmes from 27 April.

Expert groups will be appointed to work with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and employees' and employer's organisations for day care centres and schools to draw up specific guidelines and provide training in how infection control standards can be met. These will include topics such as how to organise teaching and how children should be delivered at and collected from day care centres.

The Government will lay down requirements so that the measures introduced are as uniform as possible throughout the country. These will be statutory requirements in the form of regulations.

National criteria will be drawn up for how to deal with the spread of infection in a day care centre or school.

Schooling for everyone

'Parents, children and staff must all be confident that we are re-opening these institutions responsibly. We will make sure they receive clear, reliable information on how to limit the spread of infection. I am pleased that it will soon be possible for the youngest children to return to day care and school,' said Minister of Education and Integration Guri Melby.

In order to minimise the risk of serious illness, children who are at special risk and children who live with family members who are in risk groups will not be required to return to school. They will continue to receive remote schooling.

Local authorities and other school owners must continue to accommodate pupils who belong to vulnerable groups at school, regardless of their age.

‘Our goal is for all pupils to be able to return to school before the summer in one way or another, provided that infection control standards can be maintained,’ said Ms Melby.

Gradual, cautious re-opening

The Government will assess its strategy and measures to suppress COVID-19 regularly.

‘We have not won the battle against the virus, even though we now appear to have achieved our goal of reducing the reproduction rate – the number of people infected by each patient – to below one. We must be prepared for a long period when strict infection control measures will continue to apply. We will re-open Norwegian society gradually and cautiously. I am confident that we can do this together,’ said Minister of Health and Care Services Bent Høie.

Infection control standards for health services where there is one-to-one contact, such as psychologists and physiotherapists, will be developed in consultation with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. These groups will be able to run their practices more normally once they can follow statutory requirements on infection control. This will be from 20 April at the earliest.

Infection control standards will also be drawn up for other services where there is one-to-one contact, such as hairdressers and skin care professionals, in consultation between the Institute of Public Health and the relevant sectors. Businesses that comply with statutory requirements will be able to open by 27 April at the latest.

‘Clear infection control standards will allow these businesses to operate safely. This will make it possible for us to ease the restrictions gradually,’ said Mr Høie.

Possible for people to use their holiday properties again

The Government has decided that the ban on spending the night at holiday properties is to be lifted from 20 April.

'It will no longer be an offence to stay overnight at a holiday property, but we are maintaining the national recommendation to avoid leisure travel,' said Mr Høie.

These are the changes that are being introduced:

Day care centres and schools

20 April: Day care centres can re-open provided that they can follow infection control guidelines. They can use the period up to 27 April to prepare themselves for re-opening if necessary.

Guidelines will be drawn up and training will be provided so that owners and employees of day care centres receive clear, reliable information on what they need to do to limit the spread of infection.

27 April: Schools will open for primary years 1–4, and out-of-school care programmes will open. Upper secondary schools will open for second- and third-year pupils who are following vocational education programmes, provided that this can be done in a way that complies with infection control guidelines.

Guidelines will be drawn up and training will be provided so that local authorities and other school owners and employees receive clear, reliable information on what they need to do. In order to minimise the risk of serious illness, children who are at special risk and children who live with family members who are in risk groups will not be required to return to school. They will continue to receive remote schooling.

Holiday properties

20 April: The ban on spending the night at holiday properties will be lifted.

Health services and businesses

20 April: Many health services where there is one-to-one contact, such as psychologists and physiotherapists, have been unable to run their practices normally. From this date, they will be able to resume more normal operations, provided that they follow statutory requirements on infection control. Infection control standards for different types of services will be developed in consultation with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health.

27 April: Services where there is one-to-one contact, such as hairdressers and skin care professionals, will be able to re-open provided that they comply with infection control requirements. Before they re-open, infection control standards will be drawn up in consultation between the Institute of Public Health and the relevant sectors. If they can meet the agreed requirements, such businesses may also open earlier than 27 April.

Other changes

- Parents or guardians who need to cross the border between Norway and another country in order to maintain contact arrangements with children under the age of 18 will not have to follow the ordinary quarantine rules. The changes will be brought in quickly.
- The ban on sports, cultural and other events that do not meet basic infection control requirements will apply until 15 June.
- Sports activities may be resumed if it is possible to follow the recommendations of the Norwegian Directorate of Health on social distancing and group size.
- The municipalities will be obliged to ensure that hotel or other accommodation they designate is available for people who must undergo quarantine or isolation.
- The hospitals will be required to prepare for normal operations after Easter.
- The Norwegian Directorate of Health and the county governors will assist the municipalities to resume normal health and care services.
- The municipalities will be required to intensify efforts to safeguard vulnerable children.

The following measures and advice are unchanged:

- Wash or disinfect your hands frequently and thoroughly.
- Respect the rules for home quarantine or home isolation in the event of illness, close contact with people who are ill, if you return to Norway from abroad, etc.
- Avoid shaking hands and hugging and kissing.
- People who live together can maintain normal contact.
- Follow the rules for good respiratory and cough hygiene.
- Primary and lower secondary schools will remain closed for years 5–10, and these pupils will continue to receive remote schooling.
- Upper secondary schools will remain closed with the exceptions introduced on 7 April and described above.
- Social distancing rules: you should maintain a distance of two metres from other people, except those you normally live with. In shops and pharmacies where this can be difficult to do, people should keep at least one metre apart.
- You should avoid being in a group of more than five people, unless they are people you normally live with.
- You are urged to avoid public transport and unnecessary leisure travel.
- The health authorities recommend working from home as far as possible. You should discuss this with your employer.
- Fitness centres, swimming pools, water parks and similar establishments are still closed.
- No visitors are allowed at nursing homes and other institutions for vulnerable groups.
- Most bars, restaurants and other establishments serving food and drink will remain closed, except those that serve food, are able to ensure that a distance of at least two metres is maintained between customers and personnel, and can meet basic infection control requirements.
- A number of public services will remain closed, including passport offices, administrative services for the public provided by the police, libraries, etc.
- Stricter border controls are being maintained, and foreign nationals who do not have

a residence permit in Norway will continue to be refused entry at the border.

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs advises against travel to all countries unless strictly necessary.

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