

# Press Release

## Unlocking the 18 Dzongkhags

### January 15, 2021

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As our persistent efforts of containing the spread of COVID-19 sees fruition, the National COVID-19 Taskforce (NC19TF) informs the nation with delight that the lockdown has proven to be effective and the disease spread has been contained to a great extent.

The recent epidemiological evidence gives us the confidence to “unlock” the 18 Dzongkhags from existing restrictions starting tomorrow. This will allow the people in those districts to return to life within the COVID-19 norms that prevailed before this lockdown.

The decision is purely based on the screening programs initiated in the last three days, where almost 18,000 tests and several confirmatory ones were carried out in the districts to rule out any presence of the disease.

For the first phase of unlocking in the districts on January 6, which allowed movement within the dzongkhag, each district conducted a minimum of 300 tests on random samples. Since further unlocking meant more tests, the number was doubled by way of sweeping the districts for any indication.

These are in addition to other screenings carried out in the districts, that add up to more than 52,000 tests since the nationwide lockdown on December 23, 2020. Since then, over 135,000 tests have been conducted in the country altogether.

Even for areas that were indicated as yellow zones, intensive contact tracings, isolation of the cases from the community, and additional sweeps were carried out.

With all results showing negative, it serves as an epidemiological evidence to conclude that the 18 districts are free of COVID-19. However, alongside the easing of more restrictions, the health ministry has been instructed to heighten the surveillance throughout the country to pick slightest of early outbreaks.



The NC19TF has issued notification to regional taskforces and district authorities elaborating relaxations of activities, with reminders for implementation within COVID norms. The respective taskforces will decide and announce the implementation dates.

Among others, all schools, colleges and institutes will reopen with strict monitoring of the health of students and staff. Inter-dzongkhag movements will also be allowed. Travellers, however, must register with the Check Post Management System prior to the travel.

Except for those entities which pose high risks, the shops, offices and private businesses in those districts can also open. Construction works can also resume.

Thimphu and Paro

Mass testing of the population is being carried out in Thimphu and Paro as a major step to reinforce scanning of the disease in the community.

While sample collection in Paro is complete, the testing in Thimphu engages one member from every household to arrive at a safe level of an indication to start unlocking.

Since the outbreak is contained, and the number of cases manageable, the outcome of the screening will furnish the evidence to pursue smart unlocking in Thimphu and Paro. Announcements will be made as and when the screenings are complete.

Meanwhile, with all other districts clean, it is evident that the possible source of cases would be the high risks areas, and Thimphu or Paro for now. Which is why all efforts will be made to seal leakages with proper monitoring and surveillance protocols, including quarantine.

Highlights from NC19TF notification on unlocking of the 18 Dzongkhags and selected Gewogs under Thimphu and Paro Dzongkhags	
Sl no	Activities
1	Allow opening of offices, schools and institutions
2	Allow inter dzongkhag movement
3	Sports activities allowed but no tournaments
4	All shops and business entities can open
5	Mass gatherings are restricted
6	Construction works to resume
7	Opening of the following Entertainment businesses is <b>strictly</b> prohibited. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Drayangs</li><li>- Karaoke</li><li>- Snookers</li><li>- Movie theatres</li><li>- Night clubs</li></ul>
8	Tshachu/ menchu and neykor are not allowed

PMO, Bhutan

Source: PMO-Bhutan