



29/01/21: Press release on Unlocking Thimphu and beyond starting Monday (February 1, 2021)-PMO

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PMO, Bhutan

Press release

In what is the convergence of His Majesty's blessings, prayers of our religious bodies, hard work of the frontline workers and support of every Bhutanese, the nation saw a successful lockdown.

Today, after more than 40 days, and over 280,000 tests of COVID-19 carried out nationwide, we are confident that the disease is under control, and limited only to the facilities.

The initial confirmation of the case at the flu clinic in Thimphu on December 20, 2020, which led to the lockdown, triggered fear that the disease would have spread throughout the country, hurling endless issues upon us.

As everyone stayed home to break the chain of disease transmission, more than 20,000 frontline workers under various taskforces worked day in and out to contain the disease and make it as convenient for the people.

The fact that the busiest street in Thimphu, Norzin Lam wore a deserted look since the lockdown was announced, was a quality unique to Bhutan where its people valued solidarity and unity under His Majesty The King more than anything else.

In the entire process, our mission was to arrive at "zero" number of cases in the communities, in contrast with the attempts most countries were making to reduce and flatten the curve.

Bhutan also takes pride in having tested every household twice in the capital, almost a record of sort, by way of ascertaining the epidemiological status to prepare lifting of lockdown.

But the battle is only half won as we continue to sail through the pandemic, that too amid peak winter. We could regress into a situation far more disastrous if we let our guards down today.

Therefore, concerted efforts are being made to heighten surveillance along the borders and entry points with enhanced vigilance and improved operating procedures.

More tests for COVID-19 will be conducted among business communities, drivers, frontliners, students and health workers, while flu clinics will always scan for the early signs of the disease. Additional mobile flu clinics will be introduced in busy public places and certain points along the highways.

Above all, we are anticipating the roll out of the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination program that will protect our people and enable us to prevent the outbreak of the disease as we venture forward.

The complete unlocking process for Thimphu will begin from **Monday (February 1, 2021)** and the permissible activities are as follows:

Movement

- Inter-dzongkhag movement is allowed.
- Public transports such as buses and taxis can operate.
- Quarantine requirement from Thimphu and Paro is being lifted.
- Seven-day mandatory quarantine will continue for those travelling from high risk to low risk areas.
- All travellers must register with Check Post Management System (CPMS) prior to their travel.
- Besides random testing of travellers along the check points, the public transport drivers will have to undergo mandatory testing every two weeks.

Schools, offices and institutions

- All schools will open as scheduled by the education ministry. Random testing for students and teachers will be carried out every two weeks. Health focal persons have been identified to monitor compliance and surveillance on campus.
- All offices and institutions to open. The COVID-19 Safety focal office in all offices must ensure that all COVID-19 norms are in place and implemented.

Shops and business entities

- All shops, restaurants and business entities can open.
- The closure time is 9pm.
- For hair saloons and barber shops, extra precaution to maintain proper hygiene and safety protocols will be imposed.
- Mandatory COVID-19 testing every two weeks will be carried out.
- Opening of entertainment centers of movie halls, clubs, karaokes and drayangs will be announced at a later date.

Games and sports

- All sporting activities are allowed but without any spectators.
- Closure time is 11pm.
- No tournaments are allowed, unless approved by the Bhutan Olympic Committee.
- For traditional games of archery and khuru, only 10 participants are allowed at a time.

Constructions

- All constructions are allowed.

Essential gatherings

- While gathering of any sort is discouraged, for community based religious congregation, a maximum of 25 people can participate. Prior approval must be sought from the local taskforce.
- Religious gatherings at home must be limited to family members.
- For funeral rites to be restricted to close circles.
- Pilgrimage, menchu, tsachu and hiking are allowed.

Conferences/Seminars/ Workshops

- For conferences, seminars, workshops and training, a maximum of only 25 people are allowed to gather.
- The COVID-19 safety focal officers must maintain proper record of the attendees.