

20.11.02

**15 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the criteria to be used when deciding to implement a lockdown in Jersey. (OQ.311/2020)**

Will the Minister advise what criteria will be used by the Government to decide whether to implement a lockdown in Jersey in response to a second wave of COVID-19?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

The recently published COVID-19 winter strategy - published today in fact - sets out very clearly how the Government of Jersey will respond to the challenges of containing the pandemic during the winter period. This is an update and does not replace the existing strategy but it specifically deals with the changed context and outlook that Jersey faces over the winter period. A key feature of the document is the idea of a balance of harms and underpinning this term is learning from the previous period of lockdown. Evidence now clearly shows that while effective in disrupting the spread of transmission, there were significant social, emotional and economic impacts on the population and we are now better prepared to respond to the challenges of COVID than we were in March and April because of the learning that we have received since that time. We have significantly increased the testing and tracing capacity. In addition, we have created an enforcement team and I welcome the fact that the courts are enforcing the legislation we have to ensure that key public health measures are followed consistently. Any decision to require the whole population to stay at home would be a completely last resort based on a demonstrable inability of all other protective systems to control the spread of the virus and keep people safe. I hope that provides reassurance.

**4.15.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

While accepting what the Minister has just said, the U.K. also thought that they had measures and testing that would enable them to prevent a full lockdown and we know how successful that has been. We also are aware of how quickly these things can get out of hand. Will the Minister set out what criteria they would use if they have to resort to a full lockdown? Will it be based on an R number, a particular number of cases per 100,000, or the number of intensive beds that would have to be occupied? I do believe that we should have that information as a backdrop against the measures that are being put forward. Will the Minister produce that criteria so that we can see in the worst-case analysis what it would take to go into lockdown?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

It is impossible to predict with any degree of certainty precisely what we might face as we go into the winter period. For example, we might see increasing infection in the Island and numbers rise but if we are able to control those and ensure that any transmission remains under control, notwithstanding increasing numbers, then I would not believe we would rush immediately to universal measures. But if the spread got out of control and we could not track how it was spreading, regardless of numbers it might be necessary, because of that uncertain situation, to impose more restrictive measures. It simply depends on the scenario and the facts facing us at that time. I do agree with the Deputy, it is a period of great uncertainty. We cannot feel we are at all in charge of how this virus can spread through us, and we know it exists within the population now, but in fact the greatest mitigation lies in the hands of Islanders. If we can all be self-disciplined to maintain good hygiene habits, to avoid large gatherings, to keep our distance and to wear masks when in public places, that is the greatest thing we can do to prevent this spread and we all have a responsibility to each other, I hope everyone would agree, to keep this Island safe.

#### **4.15.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Does the Minister's department track an R constant for Jersey? If they do, has he published what that is and what would the trigger point be for that to trigger a possible lockdown in the coming weeks and months?

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

A great deal of work is necessary to calculate the precise R figure. It is not something that is just out there and a figure that it can be reached for. It was calculated earlier in this pandemic. We are not constantly calculating it although we believe we are well under one at the moment. If we believe we are approaching one or at one, then it might be necessary to calculate that again because that means that the virus is spreading far more rapidly than the people who are recovering from the infection. It depends, we obviously have a limited number in our teams and if it is beneficial for the response to calculate an R we would do so but perhaps there are other tasks that our teams could be doing to mitigate the spread also.

#### **4.15.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Does the Minister believe that an R calculation is appropriate for the population of Jersey? Is it simply that it would not be appropriate for such a small population as to the reason why it is not being calculated or is it simply due to the ability to do that calculation effectively?

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I think from all that we are doing, especially with our test and trace system, we can know that we are under one and, therefore, we would not need to calculate on a very regular basis our R figure. If we felt that the situation was becoming more and more out of control, then it might become necessary to carry out that analysis to understand exactly how and to what extent the virus was spreading across the Island. It is not an easy thing to do, is what I would point out. It is not something that you just put 2 figures together and come up with an R figure. It requires a lot of research, calculation and educated assessment.

#### **4.15.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

I think that with the test and trace system already revealing instances of we cannot tell where a person got the virus and there is the danger of the virus increasing in number, I would ask the Minister to reconsider his decision not to put a paper together setting out what the criteria would be to need us to go down into a stricter lockdown. I think it would give reassurance to the Islanders and I hope he will take that action.

#### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I will discuss it again with officers. We certainly want to give reassurance to Islanders about our response, and our winter strategy I believe is part of that. It sets out how we intend to keep the Island safe this winter. But again I stress this is largely in the hands of Islanders who can adopt the good practices that I have mentioned before, which are really going to do far more than Government can do to keep the Island safe.