

2020.07.13

15 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Chief Minister regarding social distancing measures: (OQ.198/2020)

What indicators, if any, is the Government using in its consideration of whether a return to stricter social distancing measures should be introduced?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

This would have been better as a written question, because it is quite a long list, but anyway, I will go quickly. There is what is called an analytical cell, which is a subgroup of S.T.A.C., and that analyses any new positive cases on a daily basis and it also analyses active cases as a whole to identify the ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can I stop you? You are a bit muffled, Chief Minister. You sound a bit muffled from here.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I will try again, Sir. Is that better?

The Deputy Bailiff:

A bit better, yes.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Is that better, Sir?

[16:15]

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, it sounds like you are in a science fiction programme. You are very echoey. The second view was probably better than the first or the third.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Perhaps a written question would have been a good idea. I have moved the speaker slightly closer to me. That was about the subgroup of S.T.A.C. Qualitative information is particularly important for epidemiological analysis as it provides insights into the circumstances and nature of the infection and the necessary response to contain infection. However, quantitative indicators are also part of that process and this gives an indication of the information and metrics, which are also monitored daily, the number of active cases and the number of direct contacts of active cases. What is taken into account is the test history, if any, test results or outstanding tests, personal work circumstances, status of self-isolation and the number of clusters or potential clusters; the number of new positive cases over time, and that is split down by various breakdowns, including the method of identification and symptomatic or asymptomatic; the number of notifiable disease notifications by healthcare professionals, border metrics, which is levels for all countries worldwide; the number of passengers risk level arriving and the number of positive tests from border testing. Then also trend data is monitored weekly. For example, when monitoring for any increase in cases look at weeks 0 to 2 any increase in symptoms for calls to the help desk, weeks 2 to 4 an increase in hospital admissions or weeks 4 to 6 an increase of I.C.U. (intensive care unit) admissions. System capacity is monitored, including public health campaign effectiveness, well-being support and readiness levels and a whole load of other stuff - I am acutely aware of length - P.P.E. (personal protective equipment), hospital

bed and I.C.U. capacity, *et cetera, et cetera*. Medical advice to Ministers on whether to introduce any stricter public health measures when social distancing or another measure or acceptable measures will be based on an assessment of all the factors I have just listed and probably some others as well.

3.15.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given the complexity and the number of variables involved in this decision, can the Chief Minister say that he is confident that he could act swiftly and from within what timescale if, and we all hope it is not the case, the distancing measures have to be reintroduced?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Yes, I can confirm that.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The timescale? Would it be within 24 hours, within a day, 2 days, 3 days?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

It very depends on the advice we receive from S.T.A.C. To give an example, when myself and the Minister for Health and Social Services were approached on a Friday night with the revised modelling that had been taking place in terms of the initial profiling back in March, I think we were approached at something like 5.00 p.m. and the decision had been made by something like 9.00 p.m. or 10.00 p.m. that night. So if we need to move fast, we will move fast.

3.15.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can the Chief Minister confirm that if stricter measures are needed in the future that we will not again make the mistake of including children in any legislation that is enacted for that situation?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I cannot give that confirmation because it will very much depend on the medical advice that we receive. If the medical advice we receive does suggest that certain measures are required then obviously we will be taking those measures. Obviously if it is legislation it always comes back to the Assembly, but it is very much dependent on what the medical advice is that we receive.

3.15.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Chief Minister will be aware, as we all are, that the medical advice is that children do not spread the virus anywhere near the same extent as adults do and that the disproportionate effect on children's mental health of physical distancing means that the medical advice was to not have physical distancing for children. If that advice remains the same, will the Chief Minister commit to keeping children out of any legislation?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I make the point that a lot of that I believe is related to schools whereas I think the legislation that the Deputy is referring to was around gathering of groups, and it does depend on the age ranges in terms of groups that we were dealing with. But I just reiterate the point, it is very much based on the advice we receive at the time from S.T.A.C. Therefore, if the advice is that it is not necessary then, of course, we will not do it. If the advice is that on balance of risk, and taking all those ones that the Deputy has referred to into account, because I have an awful lot of sympathy with what she said, then obviously we would have to. If it is legislation changes, it will be in the hands of the

Assembly and obviously if that was the case then, as we have been doing all the way through, we would make sure that Members were fully briefed before the debate.

3.15.4 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

If the measures of social distancing, physical distancing have to change and we see outbreaks that are happening around the world, a large part of that is being concluded as the robust nature of the testing, track and trace and the contact tracing. What reassurances can the Chief Minister provide us with the continuation and the strength behind the contact tracing team in terms of numbers and its growth over the next months ahead?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I can give absolute assurance that in terms of the testing and tracing regime that we have, it is absolutely very strong and, as far as I am concerned, and I think as all Ministers are also concerned, it has to remain that way for the foreseeable future. I believe we have a very strong system, even in comparison to many other developed countries around the world, and we should take comfort in that.

3.15.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given that the emergency legislation that we passed in general gives the Government the powers to close or impose more restrictions on borders without Assembly approval, should there be - and I reiterate we all hope this will not happen - a need, will the Chief Minister commit to making that decision regarding the borders just as swiftly as any other decision regarding distancing within the Island?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

In essence, I think I have already done that. In other words, if we receive advice that requires us to act quickly and it is within our powers, we will do so. I really just make the point, obviously, I think as with many jurisdictions, we have all learnt a lot since this all started for us particularly in March. We are in a far different place in terms of levels of preparedness, which I think demonstrates the strength of the teams we have had, that is whether it is with P.P.E., whether it is for the Nightingale, all the other measures and the testing and tracing regime, which obviously Members were briefed on last week. I just reiterate in answering Deputy Ward's question, yes, always based on the advice we receive we can act quickly, but equally I do remain confident we have a very good system, a very strong system of testing and tracing and we will continue to invest in it. So, as the technology changes, as we can make those decisions, we can make the system even smoother.