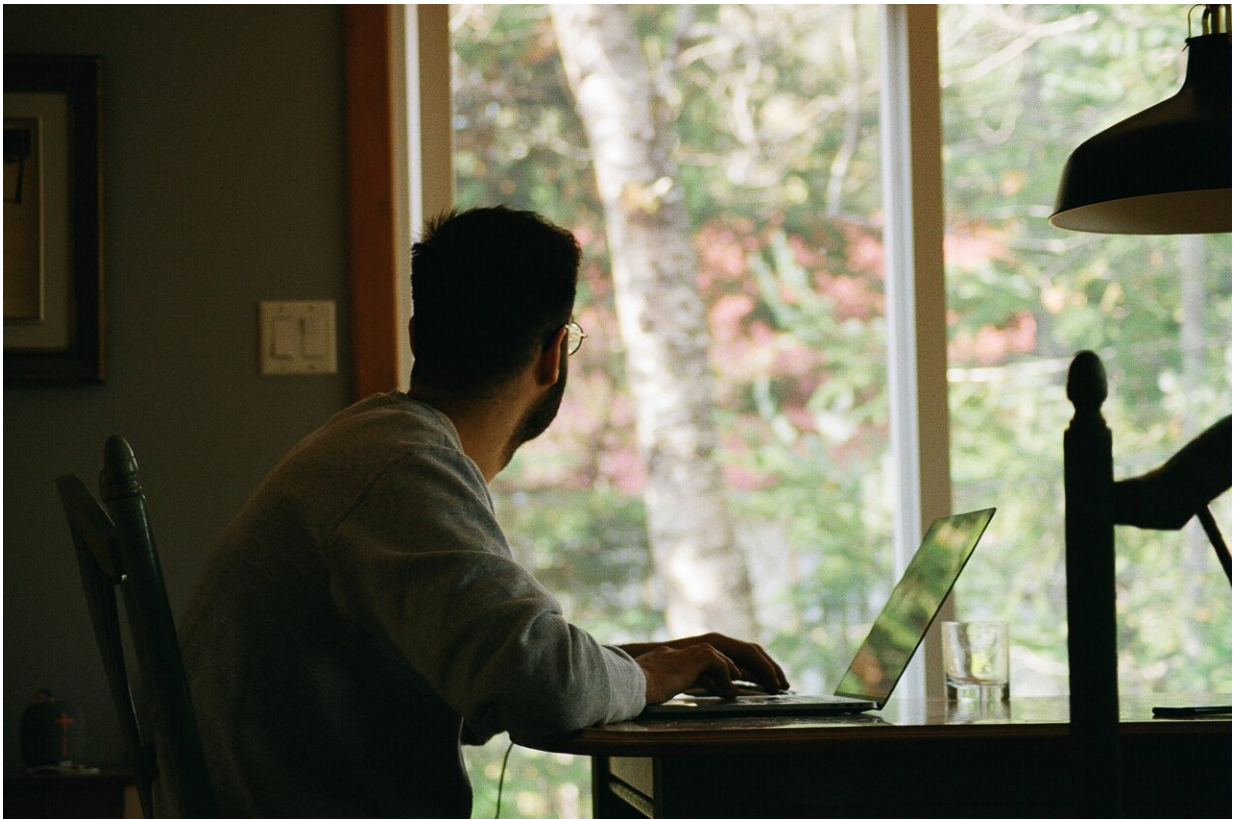


Cyprus lifts lockdown with COVID 'safety pass'

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Cyprus on Monday will exit a third partial lockdown with a new coronavirus "safety pass" system to allow people to move freely.

"As of tomorrow, Cyprus takes a step towards returning to a more normal pace of social and economic activity," Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou said Sunday.

"By implementing health protocols, testing the population and expediting the [vaccination programme](#), Cyprus is taking an important step towards exiting uncertainty," he added.

The government is abolishing a system of official approval by text message used to allow people to leave home.

Cypriots wanting to enter hospitality venues will now need to show a COVID certificate that the government has named a "safety pass".

Those eligible must have received at least one dose of coronavirus vaccine or contracted the virus in the past six months or have a valid 72-hour negative PCR or [rapid test](#).

Authorities said the pass is a temporary measure, to be enforced until May 31, to help speed up the island's vaccination rollout in a race to reach herd immunity, with 65 percent of the [adult population](#) vaccinated at least once, by end June.

Although outdoor hospitality and retail shops are to reopen, a night-time curfew will remain in place, effective from 11 pm.

On April 26, Cyprus went into a two-week lockdown as hospitals struggled to cope with surging [coronavirus](#) cases.

Cyprus has faced a third wave of COVID-19 infections fuelled by the more contagious British variant, with daily cases peaking at a record 941 last month.

New daily cases have since eased to below 400, as has the test positivity rate.

On Saturday, Cyprus recorded 397 cases, on a record 71,250 COVID tests.

The level, however, is much higher than September 2020 when daily infections were often close to zero.

Freeing up the economy comes as the eastern Mediterranean holiday island welcomes vaccinated tourists without entry curbs from May 10.

The country says it has made significant progress on its vaccination campaign, with people in their twenties now eligible for their first jab from Monday.

The health ministry said Cyprus ranks sixth in the EU for administering the first dose of COVID vaccines.

Up until 8 May, 36 percent of the adult population had received a first jab and 11 percent been fully vaccinated.

Government-controlled southern Cyprus has registered almost 70,000 cases of COVID-19 infection and 334 deaths since the pandemic reached its shores in March 2020.

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