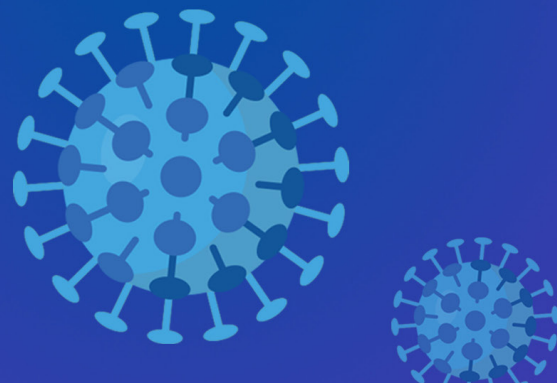# COVID-19

EU recommendations for community measures[1]

International scientific consensus[2] shows that community measures, including social distancing, will have an important impact on preventing and delaying the spread of the virus. These recommendations aim at promoting effective and proportionate community measures. Such actions must be seen as part of wider strategies implemented by Member States through their national pandemic plans.

By slowing down the transmission rate, the pressure on healthcare systems is reduced which is essential to protect patients and health workers.

WHEN TO INITIATE AND WHEN TO END COMMUNITY MEASURES?

Introducing community measures as early as possible has shown to be one of the most effective means to curb the spread of the virus. Such measures are crucial in protecting the most vulnerable population groups such as the elderly or people with underlying conditions like hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer.

In view of the pace of the virus spread in the EU, the number of confirmed cases and the number of new daily cases, it is recommended that all EU Member States introduce community measures immediately regardless of their national situation.

The end of community measures should be a coordinated decision by EU Member States. The duration of the measures should be regularly reassessed based on the epidemiological situation.

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[1] The European Commission updates constantly its website on COVID-19 https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en

[2] The recommendations are based on the scientific advice of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and feedback from the European Commission's COVID-19 advisory panel. More detailed information can be found on its latest Rapid Risk Assessment on COVID-19 as well as on its publications page https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en
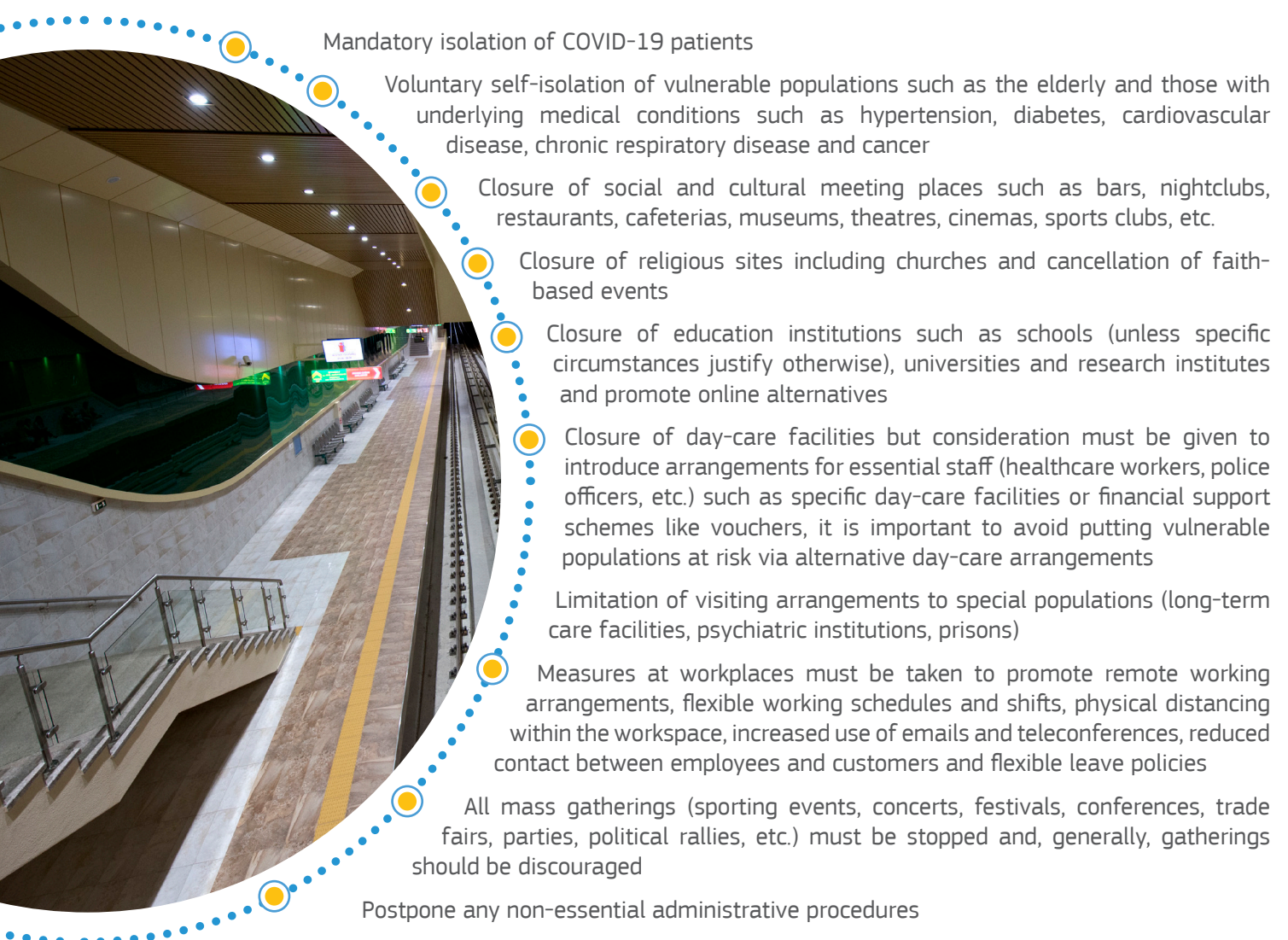
💡 WHAT SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES SHOULD BE ADOPTED?

In view of the 2-14 days incubation period and the possibility of infection without symptoms, it is important to avoid shaking hands and kissing as well as avoid crowded transports, non-essential meetings and mass gatherings.

The general population should stay at home whenever possible and limit contacts as much as possible. Food and the supply of essential products is not at risk and buying large quantities of goods is not necessary.

Stronger measures may need to be taken on a case by case basis and adapted to the national/regional context including mandatory quarantines. Measures should be taken in coordination with other EU Member States and neighbouring countries should in all cases be informed. Any measure taken in isolation is bound to be less effective.

It is recommended that all EU Member States adopt at least the following measures:

Mandatory isolation of COVID-19 patients

Voluntary self-isolation of vulnerable populations such as the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer

Closure of social and cultural meeting places such as bars, nightclubs, restaurants, cafeterias, museums, theatres, cinemas, sports clubs, etc.

Closure of religious sites including churches and cancellation of faith-based events

Closure of education institutions such as schools (unless specific circumstances justify otherwise), universities and research institutes and promote online alternatives

Closure of day-care facilities but consideration must be given to introduce arrangements for essential staff (healthcare workers, police officers, etc.) such as specific day-care facilities or financial support schemes like vouchers, it is important to avoid putting vulnerable populations at risk via alternative day-care arrangements

Limitation of visiting arrangements to special populations (long-term care facilities, psychiatric institutions, prisons)

Measures at workplaces must be taken to promote remote working arrangements, flexible working schedules and shifts, physical distancing within the workspace, increased use of emails and teleconferences, reduced contact between employees and customers and flexible leave policies

All mass gatherings (sporting events, concerts, festivals, conferences, trade fairs, parties, political rallies, etc.) must be stopped and, generally, gatherings should be discouraged

Postpone any non-essential administrative procedures

WHAT INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL MEASURES IN THE COMMUNITY?

The use of personal protective measures (e.g. rigorous hand hygiene, cough etiquette, face masks, etc.) contribute to reducing the risk of transmitting or acquiring COVID-19 infections. In particular:

Rigorous hand-washing should be done with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Alternatively, cleaning hands with alcohol-based solutions, gels or tissues is recommended. Hand-washing guidelines can be found at: https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/poster-effective-hand-washing

Covering the mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing by using a paper tissue or doing it into the elbow blocks droplets that could transmit the virus more efficiently.

The use of surgical masks decreases the risk of infecting others when worn by a person affected by the virus. There is no evidence on the usefulness of facemasks worn by persons who are not ill. It is important to leave masks for healthcare professionals

WHEN TO INTRODUCE LOCKDOWN MEASURES (CORDON SANITAIRE)?

Social distancing measures are widely seen as one of most effective means to contain and delay the spread of the virus. However, in case of localised hotspots introducing total mandatory quarantines might be effective. These measures can be implemented at regional, city or residential building level but should be carefully assessed (cost/benefit analysis).