

COVID-19 Status & Response

Reykjavík, Iceland

April 29th 2020

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1. Introduction

Since the [first COVID-19 diagnosis](#) and subsequent national Alert Phase declaration on February 28th, the City of Reykjavík Emergency Committee lead by Mayor Eggertsson has met near daily in order to plan contingency measures in response to the pandemic. The response aims at limiting the spread of the virus, protecting citizens and employees as well as possible and ensure that there will be no disruption to necessary services.

2. National mitigation and suppression efforts in a state of emergency

The national [Alert Phase](#) was elevated to [Emergency Phase](#) March 6th with the first local transmission of the virus detected. The country has since been using a mix of mitigation and suppression efforts, treading the narrow and difficult path between maximum safety and minimum social and economic disruption. This includes restrictions of gatherings, closures and social distancing, as well as aggressive testing, tracing and quarantining.

3. Restrictions and closures – no curfew, preschools and compulsory schools remain operating

Restrictions of gatherings were issued for March 16th – May 4th, limiting gatherings to a maximum of 100 people (reduced to max. 20 people on March 24th), and a minimum distance of 2 metres between individuals was implemented. This has in effect meant that many businesses, services and activities, such as retailers, restaurants, gyms, sports clubs, hair salons and dentists have had to close. Universities and high schools have closed and moved online where possible, but preschools, elementary schools and afterschool programs have remained open, although with limited activities. Education authorities have allowed parents to keep children at home from compulsory schools although they were encouraged to send them to school. In addition, as of Friday April 24th, international arrivals to Iceland must quarantine for 14 days from their day of arrival and temporary Schengen border controls were introduced. Barring any changes in the medical and scientific advice, these rules will remain in place until at least May 15th.

4. Easing restrictions from May 4th

[Minister of Health announced](#) on April 4th her decision to ease restrictions on larger gatherings and limitation on schools and preschools as of 4 May, when larger gatherings will be limited to 50 people, instead of 20, and service providers, such as hair salons and dentists, will be able to open their doors again. High schools and universities will reopen with certain limitations, while compulsory schools and preschools will return to normal. The [minister](#) based her decision on the recommendations of the [Chief Epidemiologist](#) of Iceland.

8. Aggressive testing, tracing and quarantining – spreading of virus has slowed significantly

Icelandic health officials have [tested](#) a proportionately higher number of people than most other countries in collaboration with the biopharmaceutical company [deCODE Genetics](#). This screening suggests that well under 1% of the population have the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 that causes COVID-19. As of April 29th 2020, there are 1.797 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Iceland, 137 of which are active. Most cases have not been serious, 1.656 people have recovered, and six people are in hospital. Authorities have reported ten deaths. The spread of the virus has slowed significantly, with only eight new cases reported in the last four days.

Icelandic authorities are applying strict quarantine procedures for those who have been in contact with anyone testing positive, or who have recently returned from high-risk areas. This is giving good results as the rate of disease spread in Iceland is among the slowest in Europe. On average 55% of those diagnosed with the virus have already been in quarantine at the time of diagnosis.

Airports, public transport and shipping ports are all exempt from the restrictions on public gatherings, but applying strict sanitation measures to limit the spread of the virus. Authorities have forbidden visits to hospitals, homes for the elderly and vulnerable, encouraging people to use technology to maintain good contact with loved ones who are at increased risk of catching COVID-19.

The Directorate of Health has launched a [downloadable contagion-tracing app](#), targeted at everyone located in Iceland. The app uses GPS to help locate people who may have been in close contact with confirmed coronavirus patients. Around third of the Icelandic population has now downloaded the app.

5. Overview of Reykjavík's response to COVID-19 pandemic

a. Communication and awareness raising

The City of Reykjavík Emergency Committee placed a strong emphasis on communications in its plan of action, thus ensuring that internal relations and public announcements be issued in a timely and accessible manner. The City took measures from the very beginning to ensure that communications services would remain intact for both City employees and the public. Internal website was set up in 10 languages (Arabic, English, Filipino, Icelandic, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese) already by March 16th, containing general facts on COVID-19 as well as important guidelines for employees on sanitation and security, and information on their legal rights and duties during the situation. The City updates this site regularly as the situation evolves.

The City disseminates all the latest decisions, news and announcements regularly via the website www.reykjavik.is. The front page of the website has COVID-19 links to sub-sites that compile all changes in services and special notices for citizens in three languages - [Icelandic](#), [English](#) and [Polish](#).

b. Workplace practices and commuting patterns, social distance and confinement

The City of Reykjavík encourages the use of its e-services and asks staff to work from home if possible. Employees work in separate teams and are allocated special office hours to ensure they meet sanitation and social distancing requirements. This has meant that all City services have remained intact, even on number of occasions where confinement or group quarantine measures have been necessary.

c. Targeted measures for vulnerable groups

Reykjavík City has closed community centres, day care centres, work and activity-focused support services, short-term admissions for the elderly, handicapped and people who suffer from underlying diseases. The City has also closed museums, sports centres, skiing resorts and public swimming pools. Many shops open one hour early, reserving that time for the elderly and others at increased risk. The city has taken on extra measures in order to protect its waste management employees.

Due to the limited risk posed to children by the virus, and their apparent low risk of spreading it, elementary schools and kindergartens remain open although the time each child can spend there has been limited (except for children whose parents are working on the COVID-19 front line) to comply with restrictions on mass gatherings. Education authorities are closely monitoring the situation and the Directorate of Health has issued the message that healthy children should continue to attend their school. Universities and high schools are closed.

d. Local service delivery, notably water and waste

All services including clearing streets and paths have remain uninterrupted. Waste management has taken place according to schedule, as well as cleaning of open areas and public garbage bins.

The City of Reykjavík has taken on extra measures in order to protect its waste management employees during the pandemic. To curb the spread of communicable diseases the City issued new guidelines, asking citizens to kindly respect and follow the procedures if they wanted their garbage collected.

e. Support to business and economic recovery

On March 21st, the Icelandic government presented an ISK 230 billion (\$1.6bn/€1.5bn) response package to the COVID-19. This is equivalent to around 8% of Iceland's GDP. As part of the measures, the government will take on up to 75% of salaries for struggling businesses, back bridging loans for companies, and defer tax payments, as well as accelerating public projects. The government has since taken [further measures](#), the latest ones on April 28th.

The Reykjavík City Council unanimously agreed on an [Emergency Plan of Action](#) as an initial response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan, presented on March 26th, aims at safeguarding the wellbeing of citizens, protecting their livelihoods, and secure the foundations of the community by mitigating the widespread

consequences of the crisis. At the same time, the City plans to monitor closely the development of conditions for individuals, families and businesses alike through a special City Watch on Welfare- and Employment issues. The Plan of Action contains 13 measures, including [deferral of fees, increased scope of flexibility for homes and businesses, and a reduction in real estate fees](#).

The city and its companies, [Reykjavík Energy](#), [Associated Icelandic Ports](#), and [Reykjavík Social Housing](#), will accelerate constructions and housing development and launch a new marketing campaign, presenting Reykjavik as a viable tourist destination. The City will also give particular attention to creative arts, innovation, knowledge science & technology, culture, sports and events. It will also place special emphasis on actions geared towards the labour market, in particular to groups that assumedly will be hardest hit by the situation, those who are self-employed and people of foreign origin.

6. Further information

Public Authorities in English

- **City of Reykjavík**
Information in English on changes in services and other news related to COVID-19
<https://reykjavik.is/en-covid19>
- **Directorate of Health / Department of Civil Protection & Emergency Management**
 - **COVID-19 information site in english**
<https://www.covid.is/english>
 - **Data sub-site updated daily**
<https://www.covid.is/data>
- **COVID-19 in Iceland**
A prediction model for the number of individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 and the corresponding burden on the health care system.
<https://covid.hi.is/english/>
- **Government of Iceland**
<https://www.government.is/>

Various Icelandic media/news outlets in English

- **Iceland Monitor**
Newspaper and webzine Morgunblaðið/mbl.is in English.
<https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/>
- **Reykjavík Grapevine**
Entertainment and information web/magazine in English.
<https://grapevine.is/>

- **RÚV: News in English**
The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service.
<https://www.ruv.is/english>
- **RÚV: News in English on Facebook**
The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service.
<https://www.facebook.com/ruvenglish>
- **RÚV: The Week in Iceland**
A weekly news programme from The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service in English. Alex Elliott and his guests take an entertaining look at what's been going on in Iceland this past week.
<https://www.ruv.is/thaettir/the-week-in-iceland>
- **Vísir**
News from Channel 2 TV, Bylgjan Radio and Vísir web in English)
<https://www.visir.is/t/798/News%20in%20english>