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Epidemiological situation in Georgia



Amiran Gamkrelidze, the head of NCDC.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

After the meeting of the Coordination Council, on the briefing at the government's administration, the Head of National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), Amiran Gamkrelidze, talked about the epidemiological situation in Georgia.

According to Gamkrelidze, if all the recommendations of the healthcare sector are followed, Georgia might not face the second wave of the Coronavirus. As he stated, the recent flow is not threatening provided that the recent dynamic

of the epidemiological situation is maintained, therefore, the education process or conduction of elections will not be hindered. Otherwise, "if that we do not take care of our joint achievement, and if we have the same freedom as we had last year, then surely there is a risk of condition's deterioration."

The Head of NCDC noted that the cancellation of quarantine zones is not relevant for now, thus, the citizens of Georgia and other people with double citizenship still need to be quarantined when they arrive from abroad. As Gamkrelidze said, this is exactly one of the most effi-

cient tools that are used to prevent the spread of the virus.

According to him, the last few days, when there was a slight increase in new cases of the coronavirus, were predictable since the economy is opening and the mobility is rising. He clarified that the current condition is controllable and does not bear any reason for panicking or worrying.

In the briefing, the matter of testing more people from the risk-groups on the Coronavirus was also mentioned.

"From today on, the process is extending and more people from the risk-groups will be engaged in testing. Alongside opening the economy and the politics of alleviating, the readiness of healthcare is needed to be more, in order for every infected person to be detected at an early stage. Employees of the reanimation and intensive therapy will be tested fortnightly in several clinics as well as the beneficiaries of nursing homes, the drivers of the trailers and the workers of public transport."

As Gamkrelidze noted, from July 1st the second and from July 15th the third phase of extending the scale of testing will begin. The aim is to reach the rate of 3000-3500 and then 4000-4500 testing a day, so as to cover all the risk groups. The third stage of testing includes dentists, pharmacists, and the workers of banks and the Public Service Hall.

As of June 15th, there is one new coronavirus case and 15 recoveries in Georgia. In total, 879 cases have been confirmed, 704 people have recovered and 14 have died. 2710 are quarantined and 267 individuals are hospitalised.



Epidemiological agenda considers testing 4000-4500 individuals a day by the mid-July.

MPs and the diplomats share their viewpoint on 2020 elections in Georgia



PM Gakharia: "Very pure, democratic and transparent elections need to be held in Georgia."

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

At a meeting with the representatives of the diplomatic corps, the MPs discussed the upcoming parliamentary elections. As the PM, Giorgi Gakharia stated, even though holding elections in times of pandemic is a serious challenge, everything will be done to assure that the threat of spreading the virus in elections is minimal.

"We are having elections in a couple of months and the campaign including agitations, competition between parties and meeting with people is expected to have its mobility. Elections against the current background is a tough challenge, as citizens have to arrive at the polling stations and justify their choices. We take extremely important steps in this direction to cut down any epidemiological threats and we will definitely succeed," Gakharia stated.

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaniani, all the international observers, who are engaged in the process of monitoring, were sent invitations.

"We have already sent invitations to all the international

monitors. OSCE, Council of Europe, EU, European Parliament, parliamentary assemblies and all the main organisations, which will conduct monitoring on the election are already in-

cluded. I am certain that these elections will be another confirmation of our democratic institution's maturity and of the fact that the path to the European and Euro-Atlantic integra-

tion is irreversible," said Zalkaniani.

German Ambassador to Georgia, Hubert Knirsch, who attended the meeting between the Prime Minister and representa-

tives of the diplomatic corps accredited in Georgia, noted that together with his colleagues, he is actively observing an ongoing process of constitutional amendments.

"We have high hopes that Georgia will have an even better electoral system for the October elections. We expect democratic competition between political parties, which will announce their election programs and nominate candidates. I hope that this election will be a triumph of democracy," said Hubert Knirsch.

U.S. Ambassador Kelly C. Degnan reported to the journalists that this election is a prospect for Georgia to prove to the world one more time that the country has reached progress and every other election is better than the previous one. She believes in the importance of this election to which a lot of attention will be paid. She expresses her certainty that the environment will be fair and reliable.

The precise date of the elections is still unknown and up to the epidemiological situation in the country. For now, it is scheduled to be held by October 2020, however, if the second wave breaks out, the elections might be postponed.



PM holds meeting with ambassadors at Lopota Lake, Kakheti.

Weather

Tuesday, June 16

Day Clear
High: 35°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 20°C

Wednesday, June 17

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 33°C

Night Showers
Low: 20°C

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Domestic tourism resumes in Georgia



In a video address from Lamiskani, the President of Georgia calls on the citizens to travel inside the country in order to develop domestic tourism.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Domestic tourism opened in Georgia on the 15th of June. Local travelers will again have the opportunity to visit the protected areas, monuments and resorts in different parts of Georgia and use the services of hotels and food outlets. All protected areas of the country will also start receiving visitors. Entering the territories is permitted in accordance with the recommendations developed to prevent the spread of the new Coronavirus. The Agency for Protected Areas states that all visitors will undergo thermal screening before entering the area. In closed buildings and visitor centers, including caves, it is mandatory to wear a veil and keep your distance.

Due to the pandemic, all facilities are required to comply with the rules established by the Ministry of Health.

Under the new law, violating the rule of wearing a facemask in a closed public space during a pandemic and/or epidemic will result in a fine of ₾20. However, wearing a mask will not be mandatory for children under the age of 6, people with disabilities and certain health problems.

According to Mariam Kvrivishvili, the head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration, expectations for domestic tourism are very positive. "We see that the mood of our private sector is very positive. Many citizens of our country at this stage, I think, have a desire to discover what is ours, or to travel to Georgia," she said.

In connection with the opening of domestic tourism, the President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili called on the citizens in a video address from Lamiskani to travel inside Georgia and see many sights. The President herself visited Jambakur-Orbeliani Palace and appealed to travel with care.

"I want to start a journey with

you to Georgia, to discover different places. Places that may be less well known and we all understand that there are so many sights worth discovering here," she said.

Natalia Bakhtadze Engelder, a representative of the Ecotourism Association, talked about the expected difficulties with the opening of domestic tourism. According to her, not all types of facilities in Georgia are equally ready to receive tourists and follow the recommendations published by the Ministry of Health.

Ecotourism Association reports that safety and hygiene in the regions was a big problem even before the virus spread in the country, and it will be difficult to follow the recommendations, especially for family-type hotels and family cellars.

It's noteworthy that at the end of last week, the Labor Inspec-

tion Department of the Ministry of Health of Georgia inspected 26 food outlets and fined 16 of them by 10,000 for violating the norms established for the prevention of the spread of coronavirus.

Beka Peradze, the head of the department at the briefing held at the government administration yesterday, said that 11,400 companies were instructed to prepare for the opening of the economy and detailed recommendations on prevention were made according to the sector.

According to Peradze, industry associations, including those from the restaurant business, were involved in the process, along with the National Tourism Administration, although many have seen photos and videos of social media violations in recent days.

Peradze says that the sanction is not an end in itself. He called the fine a 'necessity for

prevention' and said: "All regulation and efforts are in jeopardy if the health and life of each person is endangered."

According to the head of the Department of Labor Inspection, 939 hotels have been registered in the base so far. 150 of them have already received a work renewal permit. 175 failed to meet the criteria. Others asked for a few more days before the inspection.

Besides that, the transportation of passengers by rail also resumed in Georgia mid-June. It has been suspended since the end of March in order to prevent the mass spread of coronavirus.

After March, the first passenger train of 300 people left Tbilisi for Batumi yesterday at 8 o'clock in the morning.

Under new regulations, passengers have to undergo thermal screening before boarding the train, and as soon as they enter the carriage, they should step on disinfecting mats, after that they will be treated with a disinfectant. Social distancing is also mandatory. Passengers should wear face masks during the whole journey.

According to Dachi Tsaguria, Director of Georgian Railway Passenger Transportation, travel will be possible in 5 directions - Tbilisi-Batumi, Tbilisi-Zugdidi, Tbilisi-Poti, Tbilisi-Ozurgeti, Tbilisi-Kutaisi.

"Georgian Railways calls on passengers to try to buy train tickets online in order to be as safe as possible, as well as to follow the rules as much as possible," Tsaguria said.

According to Paata Imnadze, Deputy Head of the National Center for Disease Control, the Georgian Railway has prepared quite well and train travel is one of the safest today.

"It is much easier to control passengers there, there are tickets with nominal lists. So, the railway is the safest of all other transportations," Imnadze added.

Interestingly, the National Statistics Office of Georgia

(Geostat) published the domestic tourism information, according to which 51% of 992,900 domestic travellers visited friends and relatives in 2019 when travelling inside their home country.

The majority of the visits came from Tbilisi (average 286,900 visits per month) and Imereti region (208,000 visits per month).

Overall 992,900 Georgian resident visitors aged 15 years and older made on average 1.2 million visits per month on the territory of Georgia in 2019. The number of visitors increased by 8.6% year-on-year.

In the reporting period the monthly average number of tourist visits of Georgian residents amounted to 530,700, which is 10.3% higher compared to 2018.

In 2019 the monthly average expenditure during the visits equalled ₾153.5 million, 6% higher than in 2018. As for the average expenditure per visit decreased by ₾3 and amounted to ₾129.3.

As for the first quarter of 2020, the average monthly number of local visitors aged 15 and older in Georgia was 887.2 thousand, who made 1.0 million visits to the country. During this period, the number of visitors is 3.4% less than the corresponding data for the first quarter of 2019.

According to the agency, in the first quarter of this year, the average monthly number of tourist visits to Georgia by resident residents of Georgia was 430.2 thousand, which is 8.6% less than in the same period last year.

According to Geostat, in the first quarter of 2020, 37.7% of visitors were in the 31-50 age group.

The average monthly expenditure in the first quarter of 2020 was ₾127.2 million. This figure is 4.5% higher than the same period last year. At the same time, the average expenditure on the visit increased by 10.7% and amounted to ₾122.3.



Railway traffic has reopened on 15th of June.