

## Press Release

### Up to 6 people allowed for private gatherings and business curfew extended to 23:00 nationwide

**Date :** 2022-03-08    **Hit :** 191

Up to 6 people allowed for private gatherings and business curfew extended to 23:00 nationwide (Mar. 5-20)

PRESS RELEASE

Mar 4, 2022

- ◆ Part of social distancing measures adjusted (business curfew extension, etc.) and implemented (Mar. 5-20) in consideration of the realigned infection control scheme, the slowdown in the incidence of critically ill patients, and the impacts of the restrictions on microbusinesses
- ◆ Recommendation issuance for transfers of semi-severe and moderate cases under hospitalized treatment (Mar. 4)
  - Issuing recommendations (Mar. 4), examining submitted data, and ordering transfers
- ◆ Major infection control indicators (patient bed occupancy rate, etc.) currently kept at controllable levels (as of 00:00, Mar. 4)
  - Critically ill patients under hospitalized treatment standing at 797 and deaths at 186
  - Occupancy rate of beds for severe cases kept within the 50% range and occupancy rate of beds for semi-severe cases and at infectious disease hospitals within the 40-50% range
- ◆ Slightly over four days' worth of blood reserves maintained, requiring active participation in blood donation

The Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters (headed by Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum) held a meeting today at the video conference room of Government Complex Seoul presided over by Vice Head 2 (Minister of the Interior and Safety Jeon Hae-cheol) and attended by the representatives of the central ministries and 17 major local governments, discussing adjusted social distancing measures and the implementation status of the changed infection control and healthcare schemes.

[1] Adjustment of Social Distancing Measures

The Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters discussed adjusted social distancing measures submitted by the Central Disaster Management Headquarters (headed by Minister of Health and Welfare Kwon Deok-cheol).

#### <1> Current Status and Considerations

Due to the spread of the Omicron variant, the number of confirmed cases has drastically increased since the third week of January and exceeded the 260,000 mark\*, reaching a record high.

\* Increase in confirmed cases in Korea: 53,791 (Feb. 11) → 109,704 (Feb. 18) → 165,748 (Feb. .25) → 266,771 (Mar. 4)

The specific point and scale of the peak of the domestic wave are difficult to project. However, based on experts' simulations, it is expected to reach 260,000-350,000 cases by the middle of March.

#### <Weekly Infection Control Developments>

Weekly (Sun-Sat)	Daily average (persons)			Reproduction number (R)	Severity (persons)			Bed occupancy rate (%)		
	Total	60 and older	18 and younger		60 and older	Critically ill patients	Deaths	Severe cases	Moderate cases	Residential treatment centers
Feb. 20-26	138,902	13.4%	26.1%	1.46	18,560	541	541	<u>44.0</u>	47.3	23.6
Feb. 13-19	80,410	11.4%	27.3%	1.44	9,199	343	309	<u>31.0</u>	42.6	22.6
Feb. 6-12	46,039	11.7%	23.9%	1.60	5,382	275	187	<u>20.2</u>	44.6	37.3
Jan. 30- Feb. 5	22,654	9.2%	25.7%	1.60	2,075	272	146	<u>16.1</u>	39.9	47.1

Despite the gradual increase in critically ill patients, the number of critically ill patients compared to the scale of the wave\* is being kept at a level lower than the Delta variant.

\* Critically ill patients (confirmed cases): (Dec. 15) 964 (7,827) → (Mar. 4) 797 (266,771)

As the occupancy rate of beds for severe cases continues to rise (50.7% as of Mar. 4) due to the increase in the number of critically ill patients, the capacity of the healthcare system is projected to decrease in the future.

\* Occupancy rate of beds for severe cases: 20.2% (2nd week of Feb.) → 31.0% (3rd week of Feb.) → 44.0% (4th week of Feb.)

\* Occupancy rate of beds for semi-severe cases: 43.7% (2nd week of Feb.) → 53.8% (3rd week of Feb.) → 62.7% (4th week of Feb.)

The vaccination rate has continued to increase, with the share of the population vaccinated with at least three doses among those aged 60 and older rising to 88.4% (Mar. 4) and the share of the total population vaccinated with at least three doses to 61.7% (Mar. 4).

Many point out that eased social distancing (announced on Feb. 18) and loss compensation expansion fall short of sufficiently resolving the difficulties that have long been experienced by microbusinesses.

The government is currently realigning the infection control scheme to place a focus on the management of high-risk groups.

The infection control scheme is being realigned based on the fact that the Omicron variant is highly infectious but less likely to lead to greater severity and death.

As an extension of such realignment, the government announced the shift to the manual monitoring of confirmed cases and their co-living household members (Feb. 25) and the tentative suspension of the vaccine pass scheme (Feb. 28).

As such, many are questioning whether strict social distancing aimed at curbing the overall occurrence of confirmed cases is suitable and corresponds with the realigned infection control scheme.

The possible influence of eased social distancing on the incidence of critically ill patients and stress on the healthcare system was taken into consideration as well.

As the Omicron variant is highly infectious, although less severe and deadly, the easing of social distancing may result in a surge in confirmed cases within a short period of time and stress the healthcare system.

The government held multiple discussions on social distancing adjustment with the Normal Life Restoration Support Committee, related ministries, and 17 metropolitan city and provincial governments.

Diverse opinions were proposed through the Support Committee for Return to Normal Life, many of which advocated the easing of social distancing.

While infection control experts (Division of Infection Control and Healthcare, etc.) argued that the current measures should be maintained and eased after reaching the peak to prevent possible confusion based on overseas cases, etc., the Divisions of Economy and Livelihoods, Society and Culture, and Autonomy and Safety supported the easing of the current measures in consideration of the traits of the Omicron variant, compatibility with the realigned infection control scheme, and impacts of the pandemic on the livelihoods of the public.

The opinions of the local governments were divided between the need to maintain the current measures based on the continued increase in confirmed cases and the capacity of the healthcare system and the need to gradually ease them to resolve the difficulties suffered by microbusinesses and reflect the realigned infection control scheme.

#### <2> Adjustment of Social Distancing Measures

The government decided to advance the easing of the current social distancing measures, which had been originally scheduled to remain effective through Mar. 13, in consideration of the changes made to the infection control scheme and various expert opinions.

This decision is based on the need to resolve the difficulties of microbusinesses hit hard by the restrictions, reflect the changes brought to the infection control scheme to respond to the Omicron variant, and mirror the opinions of related experts.

Microbusinesses have long suffered the impacts of strict social distancing that has been implemented over the past 11 weeks, and the previous business curfew extension was evaluated to have fallen short of resolving their difficulties.

It is becoming more and more clear that the Omicron variant is less severe and deadly than the Delta variant.

The focus of the entire infection control scheme has been shifted from curbing confirmed cases in total to minimizing the incidence of severe cases and deaths based on such traits of the Omicron variant, raising questions about the need to maintain and follow the current strict social distancing measures.

With the effectiveness and efficiency of social distancing being compromised due to the high infectiousness of the Omicron variant, a growing number of people are opposing the maintenance of the current social distancing measures that force microbusinesses to sacrifice.

At the same time, many argue that the exact time and scale of the peak of this wave is unpredictable for a full-scale easing of social distancing.

A full-scale easing of social distancing is deemed highly risky at this point and must be postponed until the peak is more clearly defined and the response capacity of the healthcare system is evaluated to be sufficient.

In this context, it was decided to adjust social distancing to the minimal extent this time and review the possibility of a more drastic, full-scale easing of the related measures afterwards.

Based on this assessment, the eased social distancing measures will be implemented as follows.

- (Period) It will be implemented immediately on Mar. 5 (Sat.) to help ease the impacts of the restrictions on microbusinesses, etc., and remain effective through Mar. 20 (Sun.)
- (Business curfew) The business curfew of 22:00 currently applied to Groups 1, 2, and 3 as well as some additional facilities will be extended to 23:00.

**【 Facilities by Group Subject to Business Hour Restrictions 】**

- Group 1: Entertainment facilities, etc. (entertainment bars, karaoke bars, nightclubs, pubs with dance floors, singles bars, and colatecs/discotheques)
- Group 2 (4 types): ① Restaurants and cafes ② Karaoke ③ Public bathhouses ④ Indoor sports facilities
- Group 3 and others (8 types): ① Lifelong vocational training institutions ② PC rooms ③ Amusement arcades ④ Multi-game rooms ⑤ Casinos ⑥ Party rooms ⑦ Massage parlors ⑧ Movie theaters and performance venues (showtime of the last session allowed to start at 23:00 but to end by 01:00 the following day at the latest)
- (Others) Measures for public gatherings, events/assemblies, etc., are maintained as before.

If the adjusted social distancing measures lead to the decline in new cases after the peak, a further slowdown in the incidence of critically ill patients, and the stabilization of the capacity of the healthcare system, more drastic adjustment will be made to the social distancing measures.

At this moment, infection control through daily activities is considered more important than ever due to the highly infectious Omicron variant. The government has called for strict compliance with basic infection control measures such as 1m physical distancing, mask wearing (KF94 recommended for the elderly and unvaccinated), and regular ventilation/sterilization, as well as infection control at facilities frequented by large groups of people.

< Major Changes (Mar. 5-20) >

○ (Personal gatherings) Up to 6 people allowed to gather regardless of vaccination status

\* Existing exceptions for co-living household members and vulnerable groups subject to care (children, senior citizens, people with disabilities, etc.) still apply.

○ (Business curfew) Business hours extended to 23:00 for Groups 1, 2, and 3 and some additional facilities

- Group 1 (entertainment facilities, etc.) and Group 2 (restaurants/cafes, karaokes, public bathhouses, and indoor sports facilities), Group 3, and some additional facilities (private tutoring institutions\*, PC rooms, movie theaters/performance venues\*\*, amusement arcades, multi-game rooms, casinos, party rooms, and massage parlors\*\*\*)

\* Applicable to only lifelong vocational training institutions

\*\* Showtime of the last session allowed to start at 23:00 (but to end by 01:00 the following day at the latest)

\*\*\* Excluding massage parlors operated or staffed by vision-impaired people based on healthcare laws

○ (Events and assemblies) Up to 299 people allowed to gather regardless of vaccination

- Events, which are attended by more than 299 (non-regular events, sports competitions, and festivals), required to gain prior approval of relevant ministries

- No limitations for events related to public affairs and essential business activities, as well as events subject to separate guidelines, pursuant to relevant laws, provided that basic infection control measures are complied with

\* (Exceptions) Events related to public affairs and essential business activities of private corporations (shareholders' meetings, etc.)

(Separate guidelines) Exhibitions/fairs, international conferences/seminars, etc.

○ (Religious facilities) Up to 70% of the maximum capacity allowed for regular activities regardless of vaccination status

- Up to 299 people allowed to gather depending on the criteria for each gathering and event

○ (Other facilities) Compliance with individual infection control guidelines (prohibition of on-site food consumption, regular sterilization and ventilation, etc.) required

[2] Recommendation Issuance for Transfers of Semi-Severe and Moderate Cases under Hospitalized Treatment

Oxygen therapy is performed for only 727 (33.5%) out of the 2,170 occupied beds for semi-severe cases and 1,157 (11.3%) out of the 10,244 occupied beds for moderate cases. This shows that the hospitalization rate of mild cases remains high.

- In order to ensure the sufficient supply of patient beds and appropriate treatment for more patients, the healthcare resource control measures, originally applied to beds for severe cases, are now expanded to cover beds for semi-severe and moderate cases.
- Recommendations for transfers to non-COVID-19 patient beds will be issued on Mar. 4 to 731 semi-severe and moderate cases under hospitalized treatment whose specimens have been collected more than 10 days ago (as of Mar. 3).
- However, those determined to be in need of further isolation by physicians in charge or through deliberations based on submitted data may continue to remain under treatment without being transferred.
- Those requiring continued treatment for underlying diseases are transferred to beds for non-COVID-19 patients.

### [3] Request for Blood Donation

- The Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters requested government institutions and the public to more actively participate in blood donation as the nation's blood supply has fallen to less than five days' worth of reserves (caution level).
- As of Mar. 4, there remains only four days' worth of blood reserves.
- As of Feb. 28, the total number of blood donations decreased by 33,000 cases compared to the previous year.
- \* Blood donations from Jan. to Feb. in 2022 decreased by 33,047 cases (8.2%) compared to the previous year (402,188 in 2021→ 369,141 in 2022).
- To stabilize blood supply, the government decided to hold the Blood Donation Relay event and promote public officials' blood donations throughout March.
- This event is scheduled to be attended by over 1,600 staff members from 31 institutions including the Ministry of Employment and Labor, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Ministry of National Defense, Korea Coast Guard, and Ministry of the Interior and Safety.
- This event is aimed at encouraging participating institutions to promote paid blood donor leave and raise their awareness on the importance of blood donation.
- The Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters asked the public to visit the nearest Blood Donation Center or Blood Donation Cafe and participate in blood donations.
- Reservations can be made via the Headquarters' website or the blood donation app (Red Connect), which enables users to select the desired venue, time, and donation type and to digitally complete the questionnaire in advance.

// For inquiries, contact MOHW Media Relations (044-202-2048)

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