



MEDIA STATEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE TRANSITION PHASE OF THE NATIONAL COVID-19 RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

Bandar Seri Begawan, Tuesday, 9 November 2021

By consent of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam, the Prime Minister's Office wishes to announce a number of updates on the Transition Phase under the National COVID-19 Recovery Plan Framework, which is due to begin soon.

As we have learned over the past year, Brunei Darussalam was faced with a novel and as-yet-unknown viral disease that was COVID-19, for which we had no defence or immunity against. Nevertheless, with the cooperation of all parties, we succeeded in keeping the chain of infection of the virus under control with a Zero-COVID strategy that involved the implementation of stringent control measures to restore our daily lives by way of introducing specific health guidelines.

Then, on 7th August 2021, we saw the emergence of cases after a record of 457 days without a single locally transmitted case of COVID-19, which set off the second wave of the pandemic in the country up to this day. At the time, control measures were reinstated as a response in curbing the spread of the virus, while the National Vaccination Programme for COVID-19 was still in its early stages and the supply of vaccines was limited, thereby affecting the nation's capability in vaccinating its citizens and residents.

Despite having adhered to all relevant standard operating procedures, we witnessed relative instability in the number of positive cases, with dramatic rises in cases seen day after day; the COVID-19 Delta variant put us in a remarkably different situation from that of the previous year as this variant could spread more rapidly and cause more severe symptoms among patients, the majority of whom were either not vaccinated or had only received one (1) dose of vaccine.

Now with the knowledge that this Delta variant is highly contagious, we have shifted our strategy from zero-COVID to COVID-19 protected. In that regard, the Government of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has stepped up efforts to expedite the increase in protection through vaccinations by obtaining an adequate supply of vaccines. With the provision of these vaccines, we have opened



more vaccination centres nationwide in a bid to ensure that 80% of the national population would have completed two (2) doses of vaccinations by the end of the year 2021.

Being vaccinated has shown significant differences compared to not being vaccinated. According to medical experts around the world, vaccinations have been scientifically proven to be safe and effective, and constitute the best way for us to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in terms of enhancing immunity, minimising the risk of infection and reducing hospitalisations, *Insyah Allah*. The effectiveness of this vaccination strategy can be reached if government guidelines and policies continue to be adhered to, and this is clearly evident in our neighbouring countries who strive to reach the target of providing vaccinations to their people, thereby enabling them to loosen restrictions on movement.

However, it would take considerable time for our nation to recover from the pandemic, and we have witnessed increases in daily cases even as the National Vaccination Programme was being carried out. To that end, "Operasi Pulih" has been conducted as an additional measure in curbing the further spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly by instructing citizens and residents to remain in their homes from 8.00 p.m. till 4.00 a.m. In addition, other issues arising such as smuggling activities via "mouse trails" and clusters associated with the residences of foreign workers are currently being addressed by the special committee over long term. However in recent times, epidemiological measurements have been stable, including a declining *Effective Reproductive Number (Rt)*, longer doubling time, and the number of critical patients (Category 4 and 5) which has not risen and is under control.

Ever since control measures were reinstated during the second wave, we have faced various challenges such as psychological and emotional stress, mental health and struggles with online learning, as well as issues linked to work, welfare, business and economy, and being far away from family members.

To overcome this, the Government of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam announced the National COVID-19 Recovery Plan Framework on 25th October 2021, which holds the objective of ensuring a safe transition and a stable situation with minimal disruption to the daily activities of the community, as was the case during the Influenza H1N1 outbreak in 2009. Aside from that, the framework could also help revitalise the economy and businesses, alongside safeguarding the security, peace and the well-being of the citizens and residents who have been affected by COVID-19.



As we approach the 70% target, this would mark the start of the Transition Phase, which is a phase in which control measures that had been put in place up till now will begin to be reduced in phases. This scaling down of restrictions will be carried out in accordance with suitable guidelines with the objective of better controlling and averting the severe effects of infection through the implementation of strategies such as the booster vaccination programme; and the reopening of premises at limited capacity, and with priority to individuals who have been fully vaccinated.

During this Transition Phase, we need to constantly work together and remain cautious as we adhere to the policies, the law and guidelines that have been established, so as to curb COVID-19, while at the same time ensuring that the security agencies continue their monitoring on any SOP violations. This is because studies have found that this virus cannot be wiped out, and could again spread rapidly if we do not adhere to the issued directives.

Based on the experiences of other countries that had been faced with new waves after having reduced their restrictions, they witnessed spikes in cases and their respective health care systems would come under pressure. We need to heed the lessons from such situations and must be prepared to face all possibilities and eventualities in the future. In that regard, people are reminded to not let their guards down, as all our efforts will be in vain if members of the public do not shoulder the responsibility of adhering to the regulations, whereas the government and private sectors need to adapt to the new normal by way of prioritising the health of their workers, while at the same time maintaining workplace productivity.

Only if and when everything runs smoothly during this phase will we be able to make preparations to move into the Endemic Phase, which is dependent upon the data analysed during this Transition Phase. All these constitute the best solution for us to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, considering there is as yet no perfect solution throughout the world. While we cannot wipe out this virus completely, we must adapt by learning to live with the virus, post-COVID-19 pandemic, so that we could adopt the new normal in our everyday lives.

TRANSITION PHASE ANNOUNCEMENT

In that regard, with complete faith in Allah *Subhanahu Wata'ala*, the Transition Phase will commence as soon as we reach full vaccination coverage of 70% of the population of Brunei Darussalam, that is, on Friday, 19th November 2021, for the following matters:



- The opening of Government offices for officers and staff who have completed their vaccinations – with office hours set at 8.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. and with Antigen Rapid Tests (ART) at intervals – every 2 weeks;
- The opening of mosques, suraus and prayer halls nationwide, to individuals that have completed their vaccinations, and with attendance limits to be determined by suitable numbers based on physical distancing;
- Mass gathering at public places including sport facilities, and the reopening of commercial premises such as restaurants, cafes, foodcourts, cinemas, arcades, indoor playgrounds, beauty premises (such as salons and barber shops), markets and “*tamus*” during the Transition Phase will be permitted for individuals that have completed their vaccinations, and will be limited to 50% venue capacity or not more than 200 persons (whichever is the lesser number), and this limit also applies to places of worship for other religions. The respective managements are also required to ensure that their employees are fully vaccinated, as follows:
 - a. Updating the list of workers in the BruHealth application and ensuring that their workers have completed their vaccinations;
 - b. Premises are required to register their respective QR codes in the BruHealth application and their respective capacities - premises are not allowed to accept customers beyond 50% of their capacity;
 - c. The owners of premises must ensure that all individuals who enter their premises scan their BruHealth application upon entering (including all staff/personnel/volunteers);
 - d. The owners of premises are to ensure that only individuals with green and yellow BruHealth codes are allowed to enter;
 - e. The owners of premises need to ensure that all workers/staff/volunteers that are eligible to be vaccinated have been fully vaccinated;
 - f. The use of facemasks (except when eating or drinking), physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres, self-health monitoring and occasional ART testing, as well as ensuring that premises have adequate ventilation.



- Gatherings at private homes during this phase are permitted for individuals who have completed their vaccinations, and are limited to 10 to 30 persons only (depending on the size of the home);
- The reopening of some of the schools for individuals that have completed their vaccinations, and conducting of Antigen Rapid Tests (ART) at regular intervals – every 2 weeks, for:
 1. Higher education institutions;
 2. Technical and vocational schools; and
 3. Driving schools;
- Individuals who are medically exempted from receiving vaccinations are not permitted to enter the aforementioned premises.
- The mandatory vaccination requirement is extended to the teaching workforce, non-teaching school staff, staff and guardians at schools and children’s daycare centres, trainers and so on. However, those with health conditions such as allergies will be exempted from this requirement, that is, based on the health certification provided.

Meanwhile, planning and preparations for the reopening of schools are still under way, considering that fact the National Vaccination Programme is still being carried out for individuals aged from 12 to 17 years and children below 12 years of age have yet to be vaccinated. Procedures for the reopening of schools, and that children’s daycare centres and other learning institutions will be announced at a later date, that is, as soon as the COVID-19 Steering Committee has completed its review of the plans; and

- Every business premise that is allowed to open during the Transition Phase is required to abide by all guidelines and SOPs that have been introduced.

INTERIM PERIOD BEFORE THE TRANSITION PHASE

- While awaiting the start of the Transition Phase on 19th November 2021, “Operasi Pulih” will be extended by another four (4) days from Monday, 15th November 2021 till Thursday, 18th November 2021, and involves the directive to stay at home from 8.00 p.m. to 4.00 a.m.



- Once we enter the Transition Phase, “Operasi Pulih” will then be known as “Operasi Peralihan”, that is, from 19th till 30th November 2021, and the stay-at-home period will be shortened to 10.00 p.m. to 4.00 a.m. This takes into account the prospect that the reopening of premises in the Transition Phase would help spur the economy and improve the well-being of all, alongside efforts to ensure that the COVID-19 situation continues to become increasingly stable.

As a safety precaution, the plan for the reopening of premises also warrants the need to ensure that all SOPs continue to be in place, such as physical distancing, venue capacity limits, the wearing of facemasks, maintaining cleanliness, and BruHealth mobile application use. Meanwhile the use of ART prior to entering premises is encouraged. Aside from these the Government will continue to formulate contingency plans in case of any unwanted eventualities in the future.

With this announcement it is hoped that sufficient time will be accorded to stakeholders to make logistical preparations prior to the start of the pre-specified de-escalations, particularly in the interest of ensuring adherence to SOPs and guidelines that have been agreed by the COVID-19 Steering Committee.

Let us work hand in hand to support the Government’s objective in making the National COVID-19 Recovery Framework the right pathway for bringing the country from pandemic to endemic states. National recovery is a shared responsibility, wherein the public plays a critical role in ensuring the success of any Government strategies.

Individuals who are able to receive the second dose are advised to do so as soon as possible so as to help the country quickly reach the target of 70% of the population who have completed two doses of the vaccination. As a subsequent preparation for the implementation of the Endemic Phase, that is, when the COVID-19 full vaccination target reaches 80%, the Steering Committee is currently looking into the proposal to impose a fee for the ART test for individuals that have not completed their vaccinations but who intend to enter government or business premises in the country.

At this juncture, the cooperation of government agencies and private sector organisations, non-government organisations, and stakeholders including volunteers and the public, is greatly appreciated. Our thanks also goes to all frontliners for their service and sacrifices all this while in combatting this pandemic. May all our good deeds be well received with apt blessings by Allah *Subhanahu Wata’ala. Amin ya rabbal ‘alamin.*



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