

## Statement by the Chief Minister

Tuesday, 24 March 2020

Earlier this afternoon I issued an open letter to all Islanders, which will be published in the media and in social media today and tomorrow.

I wanted to update and reassure Islanders about what the Government has done and is doing to keep them safe.

And I wanted to remind Islanders about what they must do to protect themselves and to protect each other.

Islanders must keep their distance from each other. It's that simple.

That is the single most effective thing that everyone can and must do to slow the spread of Coronavirus, to ensure that our health service can cope with those who do become infected, get sick and critically ill.

It is a small social sacrifice for the greater good of the whole of society.

And I can't stress enough that social distancing – keeping two metres apart – will save lives.

This afternoon, I announced further mitigation measures to delay the spread of the virus.

And in my open letter, I have explained why Jersey has not adopted the new lockdown measures that the UK announced yesterday and that Guernsey announced this afternoon.

The measures that we have introduced in Jersey are responsible, proportionate and timely for our circumstances.

Our response is based on where we currently are on the infection curve and it's based on expert medical advice about what we need to do to slow the spread.

We are not the UK, where people were widely ignoring Government advice.

And we are not in the same situation as Guernsey, which is responding to a specific source of infection.

And because our circumstances are not identical, our responses must be tailored to our own environments and situations, and always based on expert medical advice, both in Jersey and internationally.

Thankfully, we have not reached the rapid growth rates of infection that are being seen in the UK, Italy, Spain and elsewhere – although the number of positive tests is increasing and will continue to increase.

Our response, measured and proportionate, is because our circumstances are different to the UK and other countries – and not because we don't want to follow the lead of others.

We are in constant contact with Guernsey and the UK, sharing information and experience and learning from each other.

But that doesn't mean that we should automatically copy each other – and we won't.

The Government bears the weightiest of responsibilities: we are making decisions that are directly affecting lives and livelihoods, our Island and our economy.

But we are making those decisions in order to save lives.

We do not act lightly or rashly. We act on evidence and expert advice – from the people who have quietly been training and preparing for this since the virus began to take hold in China.

The evidence and advice tells us that now is not the time to implement an Island-wide lockdown.

We have already banned large public gatherings and instructed the closure of pubs and nightclubs, schools, youth clubs, the cinema, museums, library, spas, gyms, swimming pools and betting shops. We have also had to impose restrictions on weddings.

We will go further if we have to, and when we have to, and if people flout the social distancing advice then we will have to do just that.

But if we were to bring in measures now, when they are not needed, then we could end up relaxing them at the most dangerous time for our Island, leaving us without immunity just at the point when the hospital is at its most stretched.

To put this at its starkest: if we adopt the UK approach now, when we don't need to, then people could later die who might otherwise be saved.

We would potentially be condemning some Islanders to an otherwise avoidable death.

As Chief Minister, I do not want that on my conscience.

And let me make this point even clearer to those who think they know better than the medical experts: I am not going to make the wrong decisions for Jersey in order to court popularity or because I fear for my own job as Chief Minister.

All that matters is saving the lives of Islanders and preparing for the long haul back to normality and prosperity.

We are a small Island community, and we are all in this together.

We are all responsible for protecting and looking out for each other.

The Government will continue to take the right actions for our Island at the right time, based on expert advice, and we will continue to

provide clear, truthful and regular information that Islanders can trust, which we will communicate widely and frequently.

As Islanders, we must all be the best that we can be and act on the Government's health advice.

Only then will we stay safe, save lives and come through the next months as a stronger community, able to rebuild our economy and our society once this peril has passed.