



Fighting Strategy COVID-19

GREECE

1. What is the COVID-19 fighting strategy of your government (National, local)?

Early steps, in late February before a single death had been recorded, public meetings, events etc were canceled.

On March 5, when there were 31 confirmed cases, schools, cafes, universities and many other businesses were ordered closed and telecommuting/teleworking has been adopted by a range of public services. All non-essential shops closed down (4 days after reporting the first death), the lockdown was on March 16 (including religion services). Pharmacies, Supermarkets and delivery systems are open with measures (social distancing, hygiene and for employees gloves-masks).

Greece suspended all flights with some exemptions. Exemptions include cargo, sanitary, humanitarian, state, military, ferry and Frontex flights, as well as flights in support of the Hellenic National Healthcare System, those for repatriation of Greek citizens and emergency flights.

The Greek government launched an extensive campaign informing citizens about the necessary precautionary measures and a daily press conference by the Health Ministry spokesman/head of the COVID-19 Scientific Committee.

The fatality rate per 100.000 inhabitants is only around 1,25 % and the transmission rate (or R0 value) is low (just 0.43), so the Greek government plans to start lifting the lockdown restrictions as of 4 May.

2. What is the strategy towards the population (Mask wearing, containment ...)?

Along with 2 meters physical distance rule, masks and gloves are compulsory, as we proceeding to the second phase of plan by the gradual easing of restrictions, in all closed places (banks, supermarkets, public transport, etc). However, some stores will open to public only via appointment and strict rules. The restart of operations up to this point involves about 10% of those business whose operation was suspended.

3. Are there enough masks for the population in your country?

Yes. A large Greek company started the production of large quantities of masks in two different regions, and the production will amount to approximately nine million masks per calendar month.

4. Are there enough masks and personal protective equipment for health professionals?

While early, in the outbreak-related global PPE shortage, the lack of PPE was alarming, impacting the COVID-19 response, Greece's NHS received equipment donations (and millions euro) from leading companies and individuals. The majority of PPE needs are now being consistently met, through market.

5. What is the biological screening strategy (Polymerase Chain Reaction – PCR, serological tests,)?

All people with COVID-19 symptoms are tested, using the PCR tests. On May, where the second phase of plan starts, government plans the roll out of 500 mobile units to check potential cases. So far, no other test (serological or rapid) is consider to be valid by Greek authorities.

6. Do you have enough biological screening tests?

The capacity is in place, according to national testing strategy, but it also depends on how effectively authorities can acquire necessary material like reagents from the market. Testing will need to be much more widespread for confidence to prevail and for the refugee camp's needs.

Greece has suggested EU member states jointly buy patent rights for vaccines against COVID-19 and rapid tests under development to help ensure that if they are effective they are quickly distributed to those in need across the bloc.

7. Do you have enough beds for inpatients? (intensive care and other)

When the pandemic broke, the Greek public hospitals had only 605 intensive care units, of which only 557 were in operation due to staff shortages. Government took almost all the possible measures to strengthen the national healthcare system, even if during this period the largest number of incidents needed ICU-care was 93. Hospital beds, at the referral hospitals throughout the country, have been always enough to address possible incidents of coronavirus in Greece.

8. Do you increase the number of intensive care beds in your country?

We manage to almost double the number of ICU's beds.

9. Do you have enough human resources to manage the epidemic?

Before the pandemic, austerity cuts meant that the Greek National Health System was already facing systemic shortages of personnel. Greek government has decided to accelerate the recruitment of health personnel as one of the alert measures of the country to deal with the outbreak. So far, more than 3.000 doctors, nurses, paramedics, lab specialists, etc are recruited to fill personnel shortages.

10. Do you have guidelines for good practices between healthcare teams and physicians in the context of the COVID-19 crisis?

Yes, provided by the National Public Health Organization (NPHO):

<https://eody.gov.gr/en/>

11. What are the main challenges for hospital managers during the COVID-19 crisis?

In these unprecedented and irregular times, hospital managers are on alert and should be capable of finding solutions for the organization's regular operation.

The level of uncertainty is high and managers should provide:

- * clear and effective communication with all staff and amongst healthcare teams
- * infection prevention and control training for the health care facility staff,
- * recommendations for the rational use of personal protective equipment (PPE),

- * training to all frontline workers on essential psychosocial care principles, psychological first aid and how to make referrals when needed,
- * COVID-19 proper treatment and isolation/quarantine sites,
- * psychosocial support to health workers during quarantine or duration of illness if a health worker becomes a confirmed COVID-19 case,
- * responsive communication with citizens.

Moreover, cooperation and coordination with national and regional epidemiological and infectious diseases centers is fundamental.

12. Other important information?

Firstly, a stronger health system will undoubtedly put Greece in a better position to manage a second wave of the pandemic, however as the roadmap for the next few months begins to take shape it is becoming clear we should anticipate a series of rolling lockdowns that national governments will have to manage according to their own healthcare capacity.

Secondly, the calculus of economic versus human cost is one that will continue to evolve. It is likely to become harder for governments to gain public trust and compliance as the economy worsens, especially if the negative effects are unevenly distributed as studies in other countries lead us to expect.

Last but not least, considering the tremendous efforts exerted by healthcare staff around the world, one can say that in times of pandemics, “humanity” is at the front line. In the forefront and a significant movement of citizens and companies proved that solidarity is, similarly, a never-ending Greek story.

