

CUBA'S COVID-19 STRATEGY: UPDATED EPIDEMIC CONTROL AND RECOVERY MEASURES THROUGH OCTOBER 2020

Cuba's strategy to control and treat COVID-19 across the island continues apace, including updated measures to confront the epidemic and a multi-phase recovery process. Together, these intersectoral measures form a part of the country's COVID-19 Prevention and Control Plan—approved in February 2020 and regularly updated—and are fundamental for controlling transmission and helping to smooth the difficult socio-economic transition as the island re-opens. As in previous phases, the reopening strategy relies on analyzing epidemiological data on national, provincial and municipal levels to determine what measures should be taken, where, and when. This level of analysis identified events of local outbreaks in different provinces in August and September resulting in a reversion to earlier, more restrictive measures in some areas. As part of the updated re-opening plan *POS-COVID-19* announced in October, authorities drill down even further, analyzing data neighborhood by neighborhood and

block by block, to limit the impact of more broader-reaching containment measures. The aim of the gradual, targeted re-opening plan is to prevent transmission to larger swaths of the population while mitigating effects on the economy and daily life, which have been severely exacerbated by recent tightening of the US embargo.

Following the set of detailed charts of measures published in our April and July issues, *MEDICC Review* continues to document Cuba's process and strategies for facing the pandemic with this timeline of the measures taken from August through October and others outlining the *POS-COVID-19* phases. For earlier periods, see: <https://mediccreview.org/cubas-covid-19-strategy-main-actions-through-april-23-2020> and <https://mediccreview.org/cubas-covid-19-strategy-updated-epidemic-control-and-recovery-measures>.

Timeline of COVID-19 Measures in Cuba, Recovery Stage: August 1–October 17, 2020

Date	Actions
August	
7	Artemisa Province reverts from Phase Three recovery to stricter Phase Two measures. (See chart below for measures in each phase: Main Actions During Phases of Cuba's COVID-19 Recovery Program, Updated for October 2020).
10	Havana reverts to limited local transmission phase (pre-Phase One).
September	
1–30	Havana enters month-long lockdown with measures designed to restrict movement and re-enforce physical distancing, proper use of face masks and other measures. Daily curfew implemented from 7pm–5am. People can only shop at stores in the municipalities in which they reside; exceptions are authorized in certain cases. Store hours are made more flexible, but still reduced. Intermunicipal and interprovincial public transportation is suspended; transport for health and essential workers is maintained. Vehicles entering and leaving Havana are strictly controlled. Heavy fines levied against those people violating the curfew, face mask mandate, movement controls and other infractions.
5	Ciego de Ávila Province reverts from Phase Three of recovery to Phase Two.
8	Ciego de Ávila Municipality (provincial capital) reverts to limited local transmission phase. Ciego de Ávila Province reverts from Phase Two of recovery to Phase One.
October	
6	Sancti Spiritus Province reverts to limited local transmission phase.
9	Cuba updates recovery plan, dubbed <i>POS-COVID-19</i>. Measures based on Cuban experience facing COVID-19; criteria developed by health professionals and experts; and various factors designed to protect population health. Block-by-block quarantines implemented for local outbreaks; all health protocols activated for those neighborhoods affected.
12	Havana transitions from limited local transmission phase to post-Phase Three “new normal” recovery period. Of the country's 15 provinces, 13 enter “new normal” phase, along with the special municipality of Isla de Juventud; Ciego de Ávila and Sancti Spiritus are in limited local transmission phase.
19	Interprovincial public bus service resumes; some interprovincial train service resumes.

POS-COVID-19: POST-EPIDEMIC RECOVERY PROGRAM

Cuba's updated recovery plan, *POS-COVID-19*, is comprised of three recovery phases, followed by a “new normal” phase where measures are rolled out gradually, according to specific epidemiologic criteria applied to each geographic area. The re-establishment of services and permission for different types of activities are assessed according to these criteria and with other measures, including risk level and capacity for complying with mandatory health and safety measures. One of the major differences for epidemiological surveillance during the New Normal Phase is that contacts of suspected and confirmed cases are no longer required to quarantine at isolation centers, but rather at home, where they are monitored by their local primary healthcare team. This decision was taken after data revealed that only 4.6% of the 115,299 people quarantined in these specially staffed and equipped centers between March and September 2020, tested positive for COVID-19. All phases are enacted gradually to facilitate assessment of results and compliance with restrictions particular to each phase.

Main Actions During Phases of Cuba's COVID-19 Recovery Program, Updated for October 2020

General Measures: Phases One, Two, Three & New Normal

Mandate use of face masks (in New Normal Phase: face masks are required in all closed spaces including schools, houses of worship, workplaces, wherever food is prepared, all health institutions and public transportation. Where conditions allow and in places that are not crowded, use of face masks is more flexible)

Obligate hand disinfecting at entrances to all schools, hospitals, institutions, workplaces and on public transportation, as well as systematic disinfecting of surfaces therein

Establish physical distancing of at least one meter between people wherever services are rendered, including schools

Strictly prohibit anyone with symptoms suggesting COVID-19 or other contagious diseases from entering workplaces and schools and guarantee their immediate referral to health facilities equipped for such patients

Enforce protection for workers in areas where there is risk of contagion—especially health workers and those in jobs requiring contact with the public

Adjustments August-October: Phase Three

Systematize active screening to identify people with respiratory symptoms, prioritizing vulnerable groups and those in indoor workplaces and sites

Re-open all patient care services at hospitals (some of these were limited during the first months of the pandemic)

Maintain suspension of visits to hospitalized patients, but permit one companion during hospital stay

Improve and expand telecommuting strategy

Resume services and activities related to production

Closure of all nightclubs, cabarets and discos continues (previously allowed to re-open in Phase Three)

Continue closing airports to commercial flights

Resume operation of open-air gyms

Resume urban public transportation; future interruptions to occur only when new transmission events reported

Resume visits to penitentiaries, normalizing these by Phase Two, limiting numbers of visitors

New Normal Phase

Health sector hygiene and epidemiology measures

Carry out active daily screening by primary health care personnel in the entire population to identify people with respiratory symptoms (referred for evaluation)

Carry out RT-PCR tests on all people with acute and severe respiratory infections, and during autopsies of persons who have died of non-COVID-19 related respiratory diseases

Establish a 14-day at-home quarantine for contacts of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases, monitored by their local primary health care team; exceptions for vulnerable older adults, people with inadequate housing conditions and people who are deemed unlikely to properly observe quarantine

Designate and equip at least one hospital in each province for adults and another for pediatric COVID-19 patients

Implement a national program for strengthening epidemiology, hygiene and microbiology capacities

Expand and strengthen the national network of microbiology and molecular biology labs

Education, labor and employment

Complete the 2019–2020 academic year and begin the 2020–2021 academic year, opening primary, secondary and high schools by November 2 (depending on epidemiologic indicators; some provinces started opening schools earlier)

Begin the 2020–2021 academic year for universities in February 2021 (depending on epidemiologic indicators); stagger class schedules to avoid crowding all students on campus and in dorms at the same time

Mandate 14-day at-home preventive quarantine for workers whose workplace is closed by decision of health authorities; receive 100% of their base salary

Extend three-month unpaid maternity leave for mothers who cannot return to their workplace for pandemic-related reasons (this complements normal paid leave under law); future placement in childcare center guaranteed

Social activities, recreation, culture

Gradually re-open religious institutions and houses of worship, ensuring physical distancing and other hygiene measures

Resume activities by disabled-persons' organizations

Prioritize social services and activities for vulnerable groups

Re-open neighborhood social clubs, cinemas, theaters and beaches, requiring strict observance of health measures

Re-open bars, restaurants and nightclubs with specific measures in place to assure hygiene, social distancing, etc.

Transportation

Maintain isolation areas at all airports and ports

Post medical staff in national bus and train stations, as well as airport terminals

Permit only ticketed passengers to enter bus and train stations and airport terminals

Resume interprovincial public bus and train service

Resume private transportation between provinces

Resume commercial flights for Cubans and foreigners to and from those airports that are open

Check temperature of all workers at international points of entry (ports, airports and marinas) at the start of each workday

Recertify all international points of entry, tourism installations and means of transport according to COVID-compliant health standards immediately before resuming activities

International Arrivals and Tourism

Enforce strict biosafety protocols at airports

- Arriving passengers receive RT-PCR administered by health staff and must complete a sworn declaration on their health status upon entry
- Remit to hospitals any arriving foreign visitor or Cuban whose RT-PCR tests positive

Resume all tourist activities

- Visitors can stay in private rental homes, as well as hotels (limited to those in New Normal phase); hygiene measures must be observed
- Monitor foreign visitors and increase clinical epidemiological surveillance by multidisciplinary teams providing 24-hour care in hotels, including on-site presence of a doctor, nurse and epidemiologist
- Mandate seven-day quarantine in between work stints for hotel staff
- Cubans (including those not permanently residing on the island) and permanent non-Cuban residents isolate in their homes and are attended by their primary health care team
- Report and remit rental-home guests with respiratory symptoms
- Begin opening all remaining resorts and tourism destinations for foreign visitors and domestic market

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