

Most of the Newly Infected Persons in the Past Weeks are from Several Municipalities in Skopje and from Tetovo

This map represents the latest situation regarding the number of active cases of COVID-19 in Macedonia. What is remarkable is that almost a half of the currently infected persons are from Skopje, and an additional 20% are from Tetovo. The remaining 30% of the infected people are scattered all over the country.

Such data are not the only ones that indicate that there is a shift in terms of the hotspots of the virus in the country.

According to the data from the Ministry of Health, in the course of the last two weeks, 47,9% of the new cases were from Skopje and 19,3% were from Tetovo. Kumanovo, which until recently was the most critical, in the last two weeks has had only 7,1% of the new cases. As far as the rest of the country is concerned, where more than half of the population in the country lives, the percentage of infected persons is 25,8.

Even though Skopje remains the hotspot of COVID-19, this does not imply that the infected persons are equally distributed in the capital city.

According to the data from the Public Health Centre – Skopje, by yesterday, almost two thirds of the 199 active infected people in Skopje were from the municipalities of Saraj, Gazi Baba and Cair, and Saraj remains at the top with 41 cases.

The municipality of Cair has 44000 citizens and is far from being the biggest municipality in Skopje.

The Mayor and Head of the Emergency Headquarters, Mr. Blerim Bexheti, stated that he himself was concerned.

At the same time he was critical because in this crucial period he would not receive official data about the COVID-19 situation in his municipality, but would resort to some private channels.

‘Unofficially, I am informed based on the contacts that I already have with the police station and with the Director of the Public Health Centre – Skopje. We receive information from them and we are to avoid such omissions and to that end we are to be united in informing the citizens as much as possible since they are the ones that adopt the measures and recommendations, and not the local authorities. We are to be more cautious and we are to contribute together by adhering to the measures thus avoiding the spread and increase in the number of infected persons’, stated the Mayor of Saraj, Mr. Blerim Bexheti.

The representatives of the Ministry of Health stated that neither the Emergency Headquarters nor the Mayor is to be given preferential treatment by the Government.

The Public Relations Service within the Ministry of Health disseminates information pursuant to the statistics of the Public Health Institute that keeps records at a national level, i.e. per regional offices. With reference to the information that we receive, the Public Health Institute does not inform the

municipalities about the situation, but the patients themselves', stated the representatives from the Ministry of Health.

Irrespective of the relations between the central government and the municipality, appeals for protection against COVID-19 have been conveyed to all citizens on the overall territory of the country. Such appeals have reached Saraj as well, but not only they are not adhered to by the majority but there are also people who do not even believe that the virus does exist.

Corona?! There is no Corona, they are just fooling people around.

Are you afraid of the Coronavirus?

No, there is no Corona, there is nothing.

Doctors say that the Coronavirus does exist.

Where are those infected people? Why aren't they revealed?, said a citizen of Saraj.

How old are you?

76

How have you been feeling lately? How is your health?

As a living human being, it is normal to have some health issues, but Corona never.

Personally, aren't you afraid?

To be afraid?! See where this mask is hanging! I wear it only not to be fined 20 Euros, and not because of the Coronavirus. This mask doesn't protect you against anything', said the taxi driver from Saraj.

Another citizen from Saraj was convinced that the Coronavirus was over, even before people knew about it.

'We had it here for some time in the past, but we didn't know its name back then. At that time all the outpatient clinics were full, but now it's gone', said another citizen from Saraj.

As opposed to such citizens, there are other citizens of Saraj that are aware of the dangers and they do respect the measures.

- It may happen here, among us, as well. We have to be cautious, and we are to respect the recommendations more and the Law as well by wearing masks.

- **Municipality of Saraj is said to be the new hotspot. Are there many infected persons?**
- **It is said that the number of infected persons is high. There are diseased persons as well, but we don't know from which villages. This is not a joke, and we are not to be fooling around',** said another citizen from Saraj.

The Director of the Public Health Institute – Skopje, who is from Saraj himself, is one of the experts in the country who is of the opinion that COVID-19 might have been present in the country even before due to the big number of inefficient vaccines and medicines against the seasonal influenza. Nevertheless, according to him, this does not imply that the citizens are not to respect the measures, because the virus is still here.

'My appeal is to respect the measures proposed by the Commission for Infectious Diseases. To me, one of the key measures is to avoid gatherings of people in larger groups and to keep the physical distance. Until cure or vaccine has been discovered, the only way to protect ourselves would be to keep the physical distancing and abide by the measures proposed by the Commission for Infectious Diseases', stated the Director of the Public Health Institute, Mr. Arben Ziberi.

Mr. Ziberi stated that Saraj was a potential hotspot. In any case, for the time being the situation here is comparable to the situation in Aerodrom and Centar, when these municipalities had a higher number of active cases.

'At present we have the situation under control, speaking from an epidemiological aspect, and we are monitoring all cases. In the case of all the infected persons in Saraj, we have run tests on their initial contacts and while we are speaking here today in the municipality of Saraj, some 44 cases have been diagnosed. We are expecting the results of the other persons that underwent the testing procedure. Their samples have already been sent to the Public Health Institute where they are being processed', said the Director of the Public Health Institute, Mr. Arben Ziberi.

Saraj is not the only municipality that in the past few weeks was in the centre of attention as a potential hotspot. In the first half of the month, it was Veles, where the infection spread through contacts in a larger company. At the end of May, several critical places appeared. According to the authorities, the infection spread at certain individual family gatherings. Lipkovo and Bogovinje are among the potential hotspots, as well as the municipalities of Cair and Gazi Baba in Skopje.