

6th Independent Technical Expert Group Meeting 26 August 2021 COVID-19 situation and way forward

This meeting was facilitated by WHO Sri Lanka. The key observations and recommendations indicated below represent the consensus achieved by the national technical experts at the meeting and do not necessarily reflect those of WHO. Global WHO guidance is available if needed.

URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO SAVE LIVES: EXTENSION OF STRINGENCY MEASURES AT LEAST UNTIL 18 SEPTEMBER 2021, WITH STRONG ENFORCEMENT AND HOUSEHOLD COMPLIANCE

COVID-19 Situation:

- As of 26 August 2021, the total number of deaths is 7948, 198 of which was reported in the last 24 hours and increasing faster than projected.
- Yesterday there were, 4,472 cases reported with increase in the severely ill is noted by clinicians working in hospitals.
- Close to 90% of the samples sequenced show the Delta variant and has now spread to other provinces other than Western province – it is highly transmissible with shorter incubation period.
- Hospitals are at full capacity with increasing number of health workers getting infected. Critical supplies low in stock, including oxygen.
- Virus spreading within homes.

Urgent response needed:

- Enforcement of stringent measures with compliance of the public to reinforce accelerated vaccination.
- Social support system for vulnerable population.

Note:

- Maintaining stringency to reduce transmission, caseload and deaths will enable quicker economic recovery.

Extension of stringency

1. IMPACT ON HEALTH:

- **7500 -10000 lives could be saved - COVID death rate is currently one of the highest**

Rank	Country/Territory	Deaths - newly reported in last 7 days per 100,000 population	Population of the country/territory (in Millions)
1	French Polynesia	35.6	0.3
2	Guadeloupe	20.24	0.4
3	Martinique	14.39	0.4
4	Georgia	10.23	4.0
5	Eswatini	6.9	1.2
6	Aruba	6.56	0.1
7	North Macedonia	6.48	2.1
8	Bahamas	6.36	0.4
9	Tunisia	5.78	11.8
10	Fiji	5.58	0.9
11	Sri Lanka	5.52	21.4
12	Botswana	5.44	2.4
13	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	4.96	84.0
14	Kazakhstan	4.95	18.8
15	Malaysia	4.81	32.4

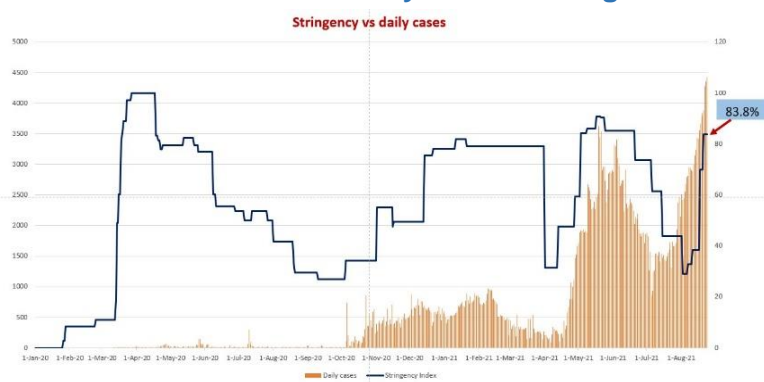
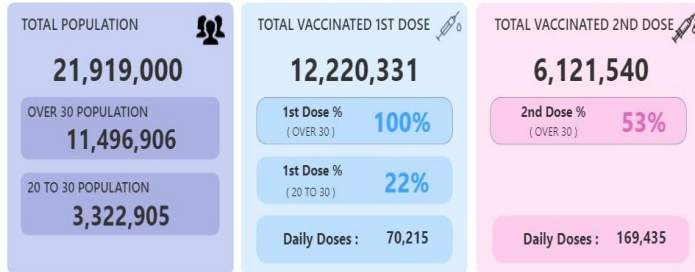


Fig 2: Stringency vs daily cases

Fig 1: Countries with highest number of deaths per 100,000 population (WHO COVID-19 dashboard 25 Aug 2021)

Extending lockdowns past August 31st is projected to reduce deaths from COVID-19. If the lockdowns are extended to September 18 and October 2, respectively, 7,500 and 10,000 deaths can be prevented relative to a release of lockdown on August 31 (Monash University).

- The vaccination drive could be completed for effective protection of the population especially in the context of rapid spread of the Delta variant



Timeline of the emergence and displacement of different variants in Sri Lanka
Frequencies (colored by Clade)

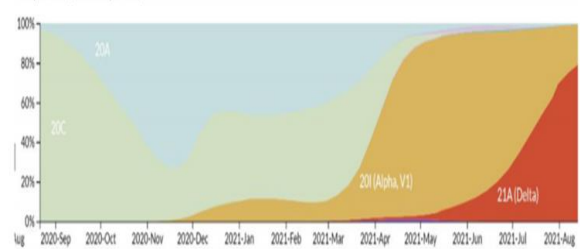


Figure 13: Change in the SARS-CoV-2 variants in Sri Lanka over time
Source: Allergy Immunology and Cell Biology Unit of the Department of Immunology and Molecular Medicine, USJP

Fig 3: Vaccination status

Fig 4: Spread of the Delta variant

- The health system would have some time to recover from extreme pressure including shortage of beds and critical supplies like oxygen

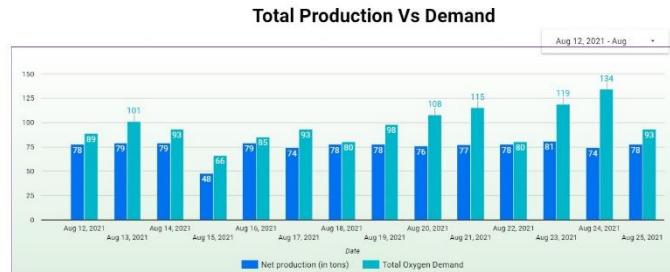


Fig 5: Oxygen production vs demand

2. IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

Table 1: Economic projection model developed by Imperial College

Scenario	Description	Economic impact in monetary terms	Economic impact as a percentage of GDP
Scenario 1	10 day lockdown ending On August 30 followed by gradual relaxation	USD 1.12 Bn	1.3%
Scenario 2	4 week lockdown ending On September 18 followed by gradual relaxation	USD 1.67 Bn	1.9%
Scenario 3	6 week lockdown ending on October 02 followed by gradual relaxation	USD 2.22 Bn	2.5%

Note: GDP estimate for 2020 USD84bn (World Bank)

- The current classification of Sri Lanka is “red” which adversely affects tourism. ‘Green’ status (UK) requires daily cases less than 950 and test positivity rate less than 2.5%. Extending the stringency measures would reverse the current trajectory and move Sri Lanka towards ‘amber’ and achieving ‘green’ status by the end of the year

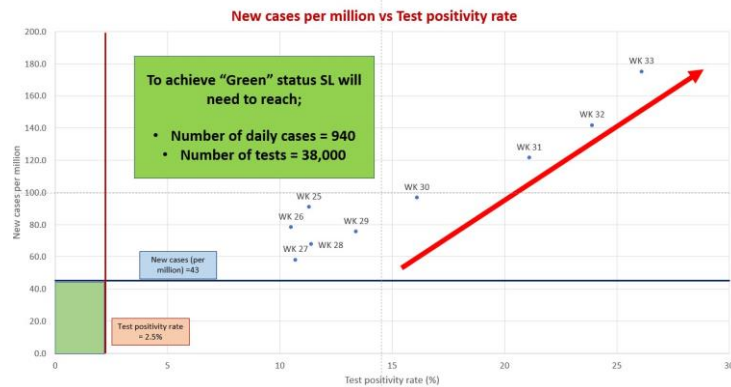
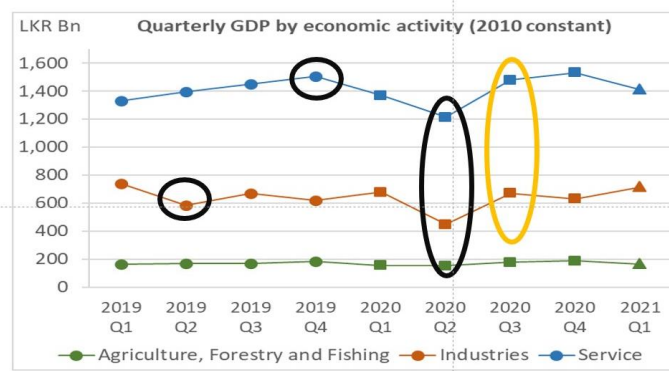


Fig 6: Sri Lanka’s status in relation to the UK classification

- Overall, global and local evidence indicates that economies bounce back quickly once stringencies removed



are

Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2020; 2021). Monthly Economic Indicators.

Fig 6: GDP reactions to shocks in Sri Lanka

Crucial enabling factors:

Saving lives

- Key adjustments in service delivery to care for cases, effective triage system supported by health professionals.
- Optimize the home management protocols and monitoring of hypoxia.
- Accelerate vaccination and target the vulnerable to be given the most effective vaccines.

Prevention of transmission

- Extend strict social measures to reduce transmission.
- Household and individual compliance is crucial.
- Reduce mobility by better targeting the measures that should be tightened using mobility data from Google Maps, mobile phone data and Facebook data to identify the most important measures.
- Plan in advance for a systematic re-opening of sectors, regions, return of employment categories.

Establishing safety nets

- Strengthen social support system by engaging with temples and religious groups, NGOs, civil society etc (i.e. a national mobilization effort) to overcome needs of the lower income groups, led by the government (and supported by development partners as needed).

List of Experts and Participants – 26 August 2021

Name	Designation/Organization
1. Dr Palitha Abeykoon (Facilitator)	WHO Consultant and WHO Director-General's Special Envoy For COVID-19 Preparedness and Response for SEAR
2. Dr Nihal Abeysinghe	Consultant in Community Medicine and Former Chief Epidemiologist in Sri Lanka and President of the College of Community Physicians in Sri Lanka
3. Dr Vinya Ariyaratne	Public Health Specialist, President- Sarvodaya (CSO)
4. Prof Asita de Silva	Senior Professor of Pharmacology, University of Kelaniya and President, Sri Lanka Association of Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics
5. Dr Rajiva de Silva	Consultant Immunologist and Head of the Department of Immunology-MRI
6. Dr LakKumar Fernando	Clinical Head, Centre for Clinical Management of Dengue & Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever; Consultant Pediatrician; President, Association of Medical Specialists
7. Dr Padma Gunaratne	Consultant Neuro Physician and President, Sri Lanka Medical Association
8. Prof Saroj Jayasinghe	Consultant Physician and Prof Emeritus of Medicine, University of Colombo
9. Prof Indika Karunathilake	Prof. in Medical Education, Department of Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine and Former President – SLMA
10. Prof Neelika Malavige	Professor and Head, Department of Immunology and Molecular Medicine, Sri Jayewardenepura University
11. Prof. Kamini Mendis	Professor Emeritus, University of Colombo; Public Health Expert and former WHO Malaria expert
12. Prof Malik Peiris	Chair/Professor – School of Public Health, The University of Hong Kong, Faculty of Medicine, Hong Kong
13. Prof Manuj Weerasinghe	Prof in Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Univ of Colombo
14. Dr Ananda Wijewickrama	Consultant Physician, National Institute of Infectious Diseases and Past President of the College of Physicians
15. Dr Lalini Rajapaksa	Former Professor of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo.
16. Prof. Athula Sumathipala	Professor of Psychiatry, Keele University, UK.; Emeritus Professor of Global Mental Health, Kings College London, and Chair, NIFS

WHO

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