

Speech by Minister Catherine Martin on public health advice

From [Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media](#)

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The government agreement today, backed by public health advice, paves the way for our citizens to once again enjoy our most treasured and joyful moments.

For too long, our stages have been empty, our performers silenced, our athletes deprived of the cheer of spectators and our traditional warm welcome as a country stymied. There have been so many lost days and weeks and of course worse. We lost loved ones which leaves a permanent scar on hearts.

But I believe the coming days offer all of us relief, happiness and comfort.

We will still need to remain cautious, this is a global pandemic.

But for Ireland, which has protected its communities with a very successful vaccination and booster programme, I believe we are now moving to a really positive place.

In tourism and hospitality, businesses will no longer be constrained by the 8pm closing time and will be able to operate at capacity again. We can now look forward to socialising with family and friends, having made many sacrifices.

We will be able to get back to full theatres, to dancing at gigs and in nightclubs, watching a late screening in the cinema or planning family holidays. And our teenagers can start thinking again of the coláisi samhraidh.

With regard to sport, I am very pleased that some of the major events coming up will now be able to take place with full stadia and arenas. Whether it's the

National Cup in basketball, the GAA's National Leagues, the Six Nations Rugby Tournament or the League of Ireland season in soccer, many more fans will be going through turnstiles in the weeks ahead.

I am conscious that it will take time to recover to where we want to be. And this pandemic has shown it has the potential to knock us back when we least expect it. In this context, I will remain vigilant as a Minister and ready. Furthermore, supports put in place by myself and my government colleagues have been and remain of real assistance to those hardest hit. I am also delighted for hospitality and night-time culture that Government agreed today to waive fees paid by late bars and nightclubs. Special Exemption Order charges will be waived until the end of April.

I wish to thank everyone for the huge efforts to keep us safe, particularly those in our public services. These efforts mean that, as spring approaches, we can look forward to brighter days ahead.

I also would like to see us mark those brighter days. And so I am engaging with my department officials and the National Cultural Institutions to see the role Arts and Culture can play, as we emerge from restrictions, including in the context of the day of remembrance on 20 March.

Tá súil againn anois go mbeimid in ann filleadh ar an saol mórán mar a bhí. Creidim gur deis ath-nuachana is ea í seo don tír. Is fíor a rá, go deimhin - Dá fhad an oíche tagann an lá.