

Independent Lebanese Committee for the Elimination of COVID-19
Brief No. 1 (10/11/2020)

In light of the recent evolution of the epidemic situation and the various ministerial declarations, the Independent Lebanese Committee for the Elimination of COVID-19 recommends the following:

1. Fix green-zoning

The current design of the zoning approach is inappropriate. It should use absolute number of cases, not rates (per 100,000 people), both because in Lebanon the denominator of inhabitants per location is unreliable (no census, refugees), and because it is not a matter of concentration rates, but decreasing cases to reach zero. This is important, because we know that with its multiplicative potential, a few COVID-19 cases can result in hundreds or more cases within a few weeks. Due to this faulty design many towns and villages are being unfairly locked down whereas areas with more widespread cases are not.

It is necessary for the government to share publicly its detailed strategy for “green zoning.” No such guidance with the indicators and epidemiological thresholds used to monitor the situation has been published to date and/or distributed to municipalities.

2. Don't open schools

Regarding the recent decision to open schools progressively as of October 12, we are highly concerned as this will very likely lead to an increase of cases particularly in the middle of a surge as it is the case today in Lebanon. School reopening is worrisome since it involves packing more than 20 people indoor in an usually poorly ventilated space on a daily basis across thousands of classes throughout the country. Children will infect each other, their teachers, and their household members including parents and often grandparents. It will further push the currently overwhelmed healthcare over the brink, as well as lead to otherwise avoidable deaths and disease among children and adults.

Within the green-zoning context, schools may be reopened in green zones, provided green-zoning is adequately designed and applied. Unfortunately, the government's failed approach cornered us into two bad choices, i.e., opening schools (cases increase) vs. not opening (teachers lose pay, kids at home, lost generation); We reject being cornered because of a failed approach.

3. Zero-covid is the only way, nothing else works

We see the surges happening in various countries that tried to “live with the virus,” it doesn't work. We need to get cases to zero in villages, towns, regions and ultimately at the country level. For more on why zero-covid is the only strategy that works, see: <https://zerocovidlb.wordpress.com/green-zoning/>

Let us reiterate that there is no way out without a comprehensive and coherent national strategy.