

Håfa adai!

I want to take the time to thank you ...each and every one of you... for doing your part to help us beat not one, not two, but three COVID-19 surges.

Exactly one year ago today, the world welcomed a lifesaving game changer that gave us the best armor in our fight against COVID-19 ...an expertly-vetted and scientifically-approved vaccine.

Guam administered our first COVID-19 vaccinations one year ago and today we celebrate our sustained momentum with

Over 127-thousand of you fully vaccinated
Including over 12-thousand of our 12 to 17-year-olds
And over 17-hundred of our 5 to 11 year olds

And more than 35-thousand of you have gotten your booster shot ...ensuring your maximum protection against this menacing virus.

If you have been tracking our latest numbers, our CAR score was as high as 47.7 and is now 0.4. Our COVID hospitalization admissions went from 85 down to 4. And over the last few weeks, we have been reporting fewer COVID-related deaths.

As a result of this reassuring data, today I am announcing a conservative lifting of restrictions specifically for outdoor gatherings as we approach the height of the holiday season and celebrate this cherished time of togetherness.

Effective Saturday, December 18 social gathering limits for outdoor events will increase from 75 to 100 persons. This is the only change to COVID-19 restrictions I am making at this time under the advice and counsel of our healthcare experts.

Now, I want to make clear that as we enter a New Year and as we near the second year mark of this ongoing crisis ...that ***we are not yet out of the woods.*** We are monitoring a new variant called Omicron, which is highly transmissible.

The good news is that vaccinations and boosters do work and are proving effective at preventing the severe illness caused by Omicron.

While we do not at this time have any confirmed cases of Omicron, it is only a matter of time. That is why we must do what we can now to prevent a fourth surge.

We do this by staying the course.
By continuing to test for the virus.
By continuing to track close contacts.
By continuing to provide monoclonal antibody treatments so those who test positive for COVID get better faster.

Again, I cannot stress enough that we have the tools to protect ourselves and the ones we love from hospitalization and the worst case scenario - preventable death.

If I can ask every one of you to reflect deeply ...beyond yourself... and to use your heart - as much as your logic - I would ask you to picture the exhaustion of our healthcare workers who have worked long hours and suffered longer days.

Picture the constant and conscious attention to the safety protocols practiced by our front line and emergency responders, and our recovering business community.

I ask you to picture the 270 families who know firsthand the pain of losing a loved one to COVID-19 ...often miles away on the other side of a video screen.

Picture the students of our elementary, middle, and high schools, and our colleges, who have experienced the most disruption to their education since their great grandparents did during World War II.

I would ask you to keep a picture of all these people in mind, as I do every day and every time we make the difficult decisions for everyone's safety and wellbeing.

Continue practicing the three Ws. Continue strengthening your best defense by getting vaccinated. And if it has been six months or more since your last COVID-19 vaccine, renew your personal protection with booster shots.

We must also push for the most vulnerable of our community ...our kids, our manãmk'o', and our loved ones with other illnesses... to prioritize getting their vaccinations and booster shots. If you have not done so already, visit dphss.guam.gov for more information and to make an appointment today.

As Christmas nears, I know families and friends will be gathering. I know there will be fiesta tables set with dishes contributed by multiple families. And I know there will be a careful return to the holidays we once celebrated so comfortably.

All that your island asks of you ...is that you do so safely and responsibly.

Because the progress we protect today will be a testament to the progress of tomorrow. I know we can continue beating the odds because we have done it three times before. And we will continue to come out on top.

From the bottom of my heart, *Si Yu'os Ma'ase'*.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Guam!

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