

Digital Public Meeting 2 April 2020

Questions and answers

Economy and support schemes

Many employees in the tourism industry are now at risk of having to move from Svalbard due to lack of income. Will the Local Council work to lower the rent in collaboration with the landlord so that it can still be possible to stay here?

We cannot answer this question now, but we are constantly working on many solutions. Among other things, we look at how the fee regulations can be used. But whether, when and how long we can use this depends on the total revenue loss and the government's contribution through measures packages. If this can be resolved, it will nevertheless be a clear assumption that the rent will also be reduced by the landlord, whether for private housing or commercial buildings.

In what way and how quickly will the Longyearbyen Local Council be able to implement specific measures that help the situation for tourism businesses and the adjoining industry?

Longyearbyen Local Council sees the industries separately and together. When it comes to tourism, it is difficult to find effective measures that contribute to normal activity. Therefore, the strategy is to assist so that these companies remain liquid. This roughly means cutting costs. Various national packages have been introduced and a number of local measures have already been taken. In addition, LL has given input to the Parliament and the government that there is a need for targeted measures for the companies in Longyearbyen. Among other things, reduction of fees, leasehold rent and freight, to name a few. We have also signalled that a third package of measures will be needed.

Do we have to pay for the closed kindergarten and SFO as usual?

No, you will not pay for SFO and kindergarten as long as these are closed. This is a national decision that we follow.

What model / strategy do the authorities have for returning to normal (including opening up for tourist traffic)?

We have not started working on a strategy to get back to normal. So far we have had enough with dealing with the current situation. We know that there is a heavy discussion on the mainland. It is the government's overall strategy that should apply, and that discussion has just begun. This will continue after Easter and then it is natural that we also participate and have local discussions on how to handle this. This is what local politicians must take into account, which is why we must use the government's strategy, where we must include the infection control doctor and the advice he gives. We must think wisely together.

We must adhere to the national framework set by the government.

Quarantine provisions

Can local authorities ease up on quarantine regulations before the rest of Norway?

It all depends on which part of the regulations. Schoolchildren back to school is one matter, large groups of travellers is a whole different and broader discussion.

The goal is for us to return to a normal situation at some point, but the world is changing rapidly. We must see what is happening on the mainland and in the world. We do not know now what will happen in the future. The main goal is to defeat the virus.

Have you considered making quarantine homes / rooms for residents who return to their families, to keep them separate during the 14 days of home quarantine?

There is no separate home for those going into home quarantine. The housing allocated is for any infected who shall be in isolation.

Can visitors, staying with residents, be in quarantine even though they do not normally belong to the household?

To receive visits is not prohibited, but visits from the mainland increase the risk of infection spreading. It is also true that where you go into home quarantine first is where you have to be the entire quarantine period. One cannot move from place to place.

This is trust-based and we assume that the rules are followed. Thus, the individual is responsible for complying with the rules.

How can it be verified that people comply with the quarantine regulations?

This is first and foremost a trust based *dugnad* where we assume that people understand the seriousness of this and how important it is for everyone to contribute. We first and foremost want to work informative and preventive, but the new Covid-19 regulation also provides for penalties for quarantine breach. We hope we do not need to use these, but are prepared to do so.

What rules apply if I travel to Svalbard from the Norwegian mainland?

The main rule is that all who come to Svalbard must in a 14 days long quarantine. Exemptions can be applied for employees who have critical social functions. The exception that a business manager (employer) gives applies only to and from work and in the workplace, on one's free time one is subject to home quarantine.

Do you have to quarantine when you arrive in Longyearbyen if you have been quarantined on the mainland?

According to the current decision, you have to re-enter home quarantine for 14 days when you arrive in Svalbard. The employer can apply to the Governor for an exemption. The business manager (employer) can grant exceptions for an employee who is needed during working hours. Otherwise, there are opportunities to apply for an exemption, if so, the application is filed with the Governor - if there are any weighty personal circumstances for such an application, cf. our decision.

What should I do if I find out that others are not complying with their quarantine obligation?

Everyone has an individual responsibility to be loyal to national and local quarantine regulations.

If you discover that someone does not comply with the local quarantine order, it would be best to encourage them to follow the order. If this fails, you can report to the Governor or Longyearbyen Local Council. We will try to follow up, initially with a clear request to follow orders. Such violations may result in a criminal report and punishment.

How long will the new quarantine decision last?

It lasts until 10 April, but can be extended until after Easter. And we have made that clear in our decision. Based on the assessments of the emergency council and the infection control doctor, the Governor is prepared to extend the decision to after Easter.

I do not have housing on the mainland or anywhere else to live there during the quarantine period. What do I do then?

You are responsible for providing your own housing even if you have to enter into quarantine on the mainland.

Who will pay my home quarantine expenses if I have to stay in a hotel?

The individual must pay the expenses for home quarantine.

Who can I be with when I'm in home quarantine?

You can be with those who usually belong to your household.

I come from abroad and will fly straight to Svalbard. Why do I have to quarantine on the mainland then?

In the Covid-19 regulation, it is directly regulated in § 5 that all persons arriving in Norway from abroad must stay in quarantine for 14 days after arriving. The greatest risk of being infected is being abroad. We locally don't have the opportunity to skip this decision.

Thus, people coming from abroad must stay in quarantine on the mainland and not come straight up here where the health services and emergency preparedness are much more vulnerable. If you were to carry infection with you from your stay abroad, this could be handled much better on the mainland.

It is assumed that the person in home quarantine is healthy. If you become ill during the quarantine period, you must contact the health care system.

What freedom of movement do visitors staying in quarantine have? Can you go for a walk as long as you stay away from other people?

Yes, they can, but they must adhere to the quarantine rules, for example, one can't go to the store or to a restaurant.

Can visitors who are in local quarantine travel to the mainland before it has been 14 days?

Yes, they can if they go directly from the quarantine place to the airport.

Leisure travel

What are the rules for Norwegian tourists who want to travel to Svalbard?

The more we travel, the more likely we are to carry infection. National authorities encourage everyone to avoid travel (including domestic travel) that is not strictly necessary.

This is especially true for Svalbard where access to health services is very limited. All travellers to Svalbard from the Norwegian mainland will be quarantined for 14 days.

Right now we have made quarantine rules that emphasize that we do not want tourists to come here. Tourists are a large group. If they come here and get sick, they will take the capacity of the hospital, which is very limited.

On the basis of national travel advice and because all travellers must in home quarantine upon arrival here, tourists and other travellers are therefore not advised to travel to Svalbard for the time being.

Does the government's advice, that all unnecessary travel should be avoided, also apply for travel to Svalbard?

Yes, it does.

Is it justifiable that travellers to Svalbard are placed in home quarantine when the rest of the household is not subject to restrictions and thus can potentially infect others in the community?

It is assumed that the person in the home quarantine is a healthy person. Therefore, the others in the household are not subject to restrictions. If the person becomes sick, the hospital must be contacted.

Local conditions - testing, emergency preparedness, traffic, etc.

What is the plan for when the corona virus spreads to Svalbard? Will patients in need of intensive care be transported to the mainland? Does this also apply to foreign nationals?

A few get very sick and need a respirator. A very few people get that sick. If someone gets so sick that they need a respirator, they have to be sent to the mainland because the capacity here in Longyearbyen is so limited. This is also challenging and takes time.

How many samples has the hospital taken in connection with the coronavirus? Has anyone tested positive?

We have taken 30 samples locally. No one has tested positive.

How long does it take to get results on the samples taken in Longyearbyen?

On average it takes two days. Due to air freight, we do not send samples to Tromsø on Friday nor do we take samples that day.

The hospital has cancelled many medical appointments. When can we expect normal opening hours again if there are no infected people and thus no pressure on hospital staff?

We work with appointments that have already been booked and will contact the concerned persons.

When will Longyearbyen Local Council and the Governor open again to the public?

Longyearbyen Local Council will make new assessments based on the situation and national guidelines after Easter. It is possible to contact us by phone and email.

The Governor manages a number of socially critical functions. That's why we have closed. We try to be available if you have tasks that need to be resolved. We then ask people to contact us by phone or preferably by email and we will try to help. Otherwise, we have the usual on-duty and preparedness.

Can I go on a snow mobile trip?

People should go on trips. There are no restrictions on it, but the Governor asks that Svalbard also take into account the advice given by the Norwegian Rescue Services Centre that you do not embark on trips that are at risk of triggering rescue operations. This is to limit the burden on the rescue resources, but also because accidents will lead to extra pressure on Longyearbyen hospital and the limited capacity there.

Be a little extra careful.

What rules apply if I want to go on a snow mobile trip to Ny-Ålesund, Barentsburg or Pyramiden?

If you plan to travel to Ny-Ålesund by snow mobile, this must be reported to Kings Bay in advance. That you take trips on foot or by snow mobile is fine, but you have to remember that the home quarantine applies wherever you come go to in Svalbard - that is to say that you should not go to the pub or in the shop in Barentsburg for example. The infection protection rules also apply here.

Now that you see that there is little traffic on the ice due to the absence of tourism, would you then reconsider the restrictions on traffic on Tempelfjorden, Billefjorden and van Mijenfjorden?

This is regulated in a separate regulation which was adopted before the corona crisis and which cannot be repealed without further ado. We have not yet considered this, so that provision is still in place. It is important to point out that you can cross the fjord according to specific directions.

Foreign nationals

Why is it not possible for foreign nationals from countries outside Schengen, who are in a difficult situation in Svalbard, to travel to mainland Norway to live with friends and family?

It is true that even if you have the right to come to Svalbard, it does not automatically give you the right to access and stay in mainland Norway. This has to do with the Immigration Act, which does not apply here in Svalbard. It does not change even in corona times.