

SHTA represents Members' interests with Public Health Officials



The latest in a series of policy-focussed meetings organised by the Department of Tourism saw a small SHTA delegation headed by Shamita Palit, Chairperson, and Secretary Roland Georges, have an extremely fruitful discussion with Public Health, whose perspectives were mainly shared by Marie-Michelle Celestine and Myra Bijoux (both Senior Public Health Officers).

PS Sherin Francis, DG Paul Lebon and Naddy Vidot, Tourism Policy, represented the department at this meeting.

An 8 point agenda provided the opportunity for SHTA to raise concerns voiced by members, specifically:

1. The need to address problems with outdated provisions, contradictions and duplications within the present set of regulations.
2. The need for risk-based classification, providing greater relevance between policy and individual properties (especially small and medium sized ones).
3. The need to reduce overlapping requirements (with other agencies) and establish which authority holds precedence regarding inspections (for example). The need to establish one checklist covering health, hygiene, sanitation, food safety, waste processing and water.
4. The need to recognise and address constraints faced by older establishments through reasonable and common sense transition periods.
5. The need to improve consistency across initial licensing, renewals, expansion and investment processes.
6. The need to balance the protection of public health with the avoidance of excessive financial barriers for tourism businesses, especially smaller ones.
7. The need to hold meaningful consultations with the private sector before introducing material regulatory changes. This should be the case with all government policy amendments and developments.
8. The need for a digital platform which shows all regulations and PH requirements and operates as an online portal for additional private/public sector contact. This has been coming for many years – see prior updates on Employment and Licensing.

Much of the above is concerned with communication. Tourism businesses need to have easy access to accurate information about PH requirements which fit their particular business character.

This information will generally fall into two sections; Setting Up (what you need to know at the business planning stage) and Operational (how you need to maintain compliance with regulations once open and operational).

SHTA and Public Health agreed (with Tourism's endorsement) to work together to publish straightforward and accurate information sheets on both sections, each one tailored for specific business categories. These categories will be determined by size as per licensing classifications.

The first step in achieving this will be for Public Health to share with SHTA all existing regulations, after which a small sub-committee can draft the information sheets prior to evaluation and editing by a larger cross section of tourism professionals and the PH authorities. Once agreed and designed the information can be made available for all relevant parties.

All present agreed that this initiative will deliver clear and straightforward check lists which potential, renewing or would-be use-changers will find useful.

Timeframe? SHTA would like to complete this work in a month following receipt of the required regulations and policy documents from Public Health.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...

Seychelles tightens travel measures amid DRC Ebola outbreak



Dr. Gedeon presenting the new measures at the press conference held on October 15th.

Dr Jude Gedeon, Seychelles' Public Health Commissioner, has announced new restrictions on travellers arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in order to protect Seychelles from the Ebola outbreak causing significant concern in the DRC.

Speaking to the media Dr. Gedeon advised the public of measures being taken, which can be summarised as follows:

- A restriction on entry for foreign nationals who have recently been in the DRC.
- Additional public-health measures for Seychellois citizens and residents returning from the DMC
- DRC nationals wishing to enter Seychelles can only do so if they have spent at least 21 days outside the DRC before travelling to Seychelles. They must also have complied with the health-monitoring requirements in the country where they stayed and provide supporting documents as required
- Seychellois citizens and residents arriving from the DRC, or who have been there during the preceding 21 days, are subject to mandatory public-health measures, inclusive of – but not limited to – quarantine at a designated facility or approved location for the remainder of a mandatory 21 day incubation period.
- Effective immediately, travel to the DRC is strongly discouraged until further notice.
- Decisions on quarantine will depend on an individual's assessed risk, with monitoring arrangements intended to identify anyone developing symptoms.
- The measures take immediate effect and will remain in place until further notice as authorities continue to monitor developments related to the outbreak.
- These additional entry requirements will be applied through the Travizory Electronic Border System. Airlines will be required to check that passengers have permission to travel before boarding. Travel agents and tour operators must also inform passengers of the new requirements.

THE OUTBREAK IN CONTEXT

By the 15th October the outbreak had led to more than 9,200 confirmed cases and over 4,400 confirmed deaths.

No Ebola cases have been detected in Seychelles.

Dr Gedeon said authorities were monitoring the situation in Kenya, where Ebola cases linked to the outbreak had been reported, but were not applying the same restrictions to travellers arriving from or via Kenya at this stage. The stated reason was that community transmission had not been established there.

That distinction could change if the outbreak spreads, so prospective travellers will need to check the latest requirements rather than assume that a transit through another African country is automatically restricted or automatically safe.

Dr. Gedeon stated that the decision to strengthen measures followed a review by the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response committee on Tuesday. Authorities considered the outbreak's continued spread into new health zones in the DRC and the risk of transmission beyond its borders. Seychelles has been monitoring travellers arriving from the DRC for several months, he added. This includes checking accommodation details, providing health advice through the travel authorisation system and contacting travellers directly.

Asked about local preparedness, he said arrangements included an isolation facility, protective equipment, staff training and coordination with a reference laboratory in South Africa for testing samples. Training extends beyond doctors and nurses to other health workers involved in transporting patients and handling potentially infectious materials, he said. He added that preparedness required continued improvement rather than assuming the health system was completely ready.

As with COVID-19 restrictions these new measures focus upon travel history rather than nationality.