

SA moves to Level 3 of lockdown

In a move to curb the spread of Covid-19, South Africa has moved to adjusted Level 3 from Level 1 with immediate effect, President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Monday evening, 28 December.



Image source: www.pixabay.com

The president's announcement comes after South Africa breached the one million mark of confirmed Covid-19 cases, after 9,502 cases were reported on Sunday, bringing the cumulative total to 1,004,413 cases. In addition, South African genomic scientists recently identified a variant of the SARS-COV-2 virus, currently termed 501.V2 variant, which appears to be more contagious than the virus that drove the first wave of infections.

"Several of the Level 3 regulations are being strengthened to further limit the potential for transmission, while doing everything possible to keep the economy open," Ramaphosa said.

The president addressed the nation on developments in relation to the country's response to the coronavirus pandemic following a meeting on Sunday of the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) and special sessions on Monday of the president's Coordinating Council (PCC) and Cabinet.

Gatherings, extended curfew

Under the adjusted Level 3 regulations, all indoor and outdoor gatherings will be prohibited for 14 days from the date hereof, except for funerals and other limited exceptions as detailed in the regulations, such as restaurants, museums, gyms and casinos.

These will further be set out by the minister in regulations and will be reviewed after that period.

Funerals may not be attended by more than 50 people and social distancing measures must be adhered to.

“Every business premises must determine the maximum number of staff and customers permitted at any one time based on our social-distancing guidelines and may not exceed that limit.

“The nationwide curfew will be extended from 9pm to 6am. Apart from permitted workers and for medical and security emergencies, nobody is allowed outside their place of residence during curfew,” the president said.

He further announced that non-essential establishments – including shops, restaurants, bars and all cultural venues – must close at 8pm. The list of these establishments will be released shortly.

Compulsory wearing of facemasks

“From now on, it is compulsory for every person to wear a mask in a public space. A person who does not wear a cloth mask covering over the nose and mouth in a public place will be committing an offence.

“A person who does not wear a mask could be arrested and prosecuted. On conviction, they will be liable to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months or to both a fine and imprisonment. This is a drastic measure, but is now necessary to ensure compliance with the most basic of preventative measures,” Ramaphosa said.

Saving lives and the sale of alcohol

The president expressed concern about the elderly and those with co-morbidities. He urged South Africans to do their utmost to protect themselves from the virus, especially minimising their contact with other people.

In the televised address, the president also turned his attention to the sale of alcohol.

“One of the more difficult areas of regulation relates to the sale of alcohol. The liquor industry is a major employer and an important contributor to our economy.

“Our priority at this time, however, must be to save lives. Reckless behaviour due to alcohol intoxication has contributed to increased transmission. Alcohol-related accidents and violence are putting pressure on our hospital emergency units,” the president said.

As a result, regulations relating to alcohol have been strengthened. The sale of alcohol from retail outlets and the on-site consumption of alcohol will not be permitted.

“The prohibition on consuming alcohol in public spaces like parks and beaches remains. Distribution and transportation will be prohibited with exceptions that will be explained by the minister.

“These regulations may be reviewed within the next few weeks if we see a sustained decline in infections and hospital admissions,” the president said.

Keeping the economy afloat

He said the adjusted Level 3 regulations will keep the economy open while strengthening measures to reduce transmission.

“With a few exceptions, businesses may continue to operate as long as all relevant health protocols and social distancing measures are adhered to.

“Night clubs and businesses engaged in the sale and transportation of liquor will not be allowed to operate,” the president said.

The Level 3 restrictions will remain in place until 15 January 2021.

“These measures will be reviewed at that time on the basis of the state of the pandemic in the country,” the president said.

Hotspots

Meanwhile, municipalities defined as hotspots will be subject to additional restrictions until there is a clear and sustained decline in infections.

Following a review of the latest available data on infections and hospitalisations, and consultations with affected provinces, cabinet has decided that further areas be declared as coronavirus hotspots.

In the Eastern Cape, the following areas have been declared as hotspots: Chris Hani District, Buffalo City, Amathole District, Alfred Nzo District and the OR Tambo District.

These are in addition to Nelson Mandela Bay Metro and the Sarah Baartman District, which have already been declared hotspots.

“In KwaZulu-Natal, these are eThekweni, Umgungundlovu District, Ugu District, Harry Gwala District, King Cetshwayo District and Ilembe District.

“In Gauteng, the West Rand District, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni and Johannesburg are declared hotspots.

“In the Western Cape, the West Coast District, Overberg District, Winelands District, Cape Town, Central Karoo District are hotspots. This is in addition to the Garden Route District,” the president said.

In the North West, the Bojanala District has been declared a hotspot area, while in Limpopo, the Waterberg District and the Capricorn District have been declared coronavirus hotspots.

“As the infections continue to rise, cabinet, on the advice of the National Coronavirus Command Council, has decided that all beaches, dams, lakes, rivers, public parks and public swimming pools in hotspot areas will be closed to the public with effect from tomorrow.

“National and provincial parks and other parks where access control measures and entry limitations are already in place may remain open to the public,” the president said.

He said those living in the hotspot districts are strongly encouraged to minimise their travel within the district to essential travel so as to minimise contact with other people.

“Travel to hotspot districts should be avoided if possible. The stark reality is that every single district in this country has the potential to become a hotspot unless we observe the current preventative measures,” Ramaphosa said.

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