

Level 1 is here

It's been a long six months, but the data is finally showing that South Africa has traversed the Covid-19 peak, and the infection rate is holding steady enough for the country to move to level 1 restrictions.



President Cyril Ramaphosa

President Cyril Ramaphosa made the announcement during a live address to the nation on Wednesday evening, that the new alert level will take effect from midnight on Sunday, 20 September 2020.

“We have withstood the coronavirus storm. Now is the time to return our country, its people and our economy to a situation that is more normal, that more resembles the lives that we were living six months ago. It is time to move to what will become our new normal for as long as the coronavirus is with us,” he said.

The president said following consultations with provincial and local government representatives, and drawing on the advice of scientists and engagements with various stakeholders, Cabinet had this morning decided that the country should move to alert level 1.

Wednesday's address follows a series of meetings with the National Coronavirus Command Council on Monday followed by a meeting of the President's Coordinating Council on Tuesday and finally a special sitting of Cabinet on Wednesday.

Last week Cabinet approved the extension of the Covid-19 National State of Disaster to 15 October 2020.

Two months ago, at the height of the storm, South Africa was recording around 12,000 new cases a day. Currently, the country is on average recording less than 2,000 cases a day.

Ramaphosa said the move to level 1 recognises that the levels of infection are relatively low and that there is sufficient capacity in the country's health system to manage the current need.

Under alert level 1 social, religious, political and other gatherings will be permitted, as long as the number of people does not exceed 50% of the normal capacity of a venue, up to a maximum of 250 people for indoor gatherings and 500 people for outdoor gatherings.

Health protocols, such as washing or sanitising hands, social distancing and mask-wearing, will need to be strictly observed.

Under level 1, the maximum number of people who may attend a funeral is increased from 50 to 100 due to the higher risk of viral transmission at funerals. Night vigils are still not permitted.

Exercise and recreation

While venues for exercise, recreation and entertainment – such as gyms and theatres - were initially limited to 50 people, these establishments will now be allowed to accommodate up to 50% of their venue's capacity as determined by the available floor space.

Establishments will still operate subject to social distancing and other health protocols.

However, sport fanatics will remain confined to the comfort of their homes as existing restrictions on sporting events remain in place.

Where required for the purposes of voter registration or special voting, the Independent Electoral Commission will be allowed to visit correctional centres, health facilities, old age homes and other similar institutions.

As part of the gradual return to regular economic and social activity, government revised the curfew hours. The curfew will now apply between midnight and 4am.

International travel

International borders will also open on 1 October 2020, with various restrictions in place.

Government returns to full operation

With government moving to increasing economic activity, The Department of Public Service and Administration will shortly issue circulars to all public servants on the measures that will enable the return of all areas of government to full operation safely and without undue delay.

Alcohol sales extended to Friday

In light of the move to increase economic activity, the sale of alcohol at retail outlets for home consumption is now permitted from Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm.

Alcohol will be permitted for on-site consumption in licensed establishments only and with strict adherence to the curfew.

All the revised regulations remain subject to all the health protocols, include the wearing of masks and washing or sanitising of hands.

In the next few days, the updated regulations will be published and with ministers tasked to iron out the details through briefings.

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