



STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA ON PROGRESS IN THE NATIONAL EFFORT TO CONTAIN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

3 DECEMBER 2020

My fellow South Africans,

I wish to speak to you this evening about the current state of the coronavirus pandemic in South Africa.

Before doing so, I wish to express my appreciation to all South Africans who observed the five days of mourning from the 25th to the 29th of November for those who have lost their lives to COVID-19 and gender-based violence and femicide.

As we remember them, let us pledge that we will do everything within our means to contain these two pandemics and save lives.

The global pandemic continues to cause devastation across the world, with more than 64 million infections and nearly one-and-a-half million confirmed deaths.

We have seen many countries around the world experience a resurgence of the coronavirus, some with second waves even worse than their initial peak.

Where South Africa once had the fifth highest number of infections in the world, we have now fallen to 14th in the world as infections in other countries have surged dramatically.

And yet, despite the progress we have made, we have always known that a second wave of infections is possible in South Africa if we do not take the necessary measures to protect ourselves and those around us.

There is now clear evidence of a resurgence of infections in parts of our own country, which, if not confronted decisively and directly, could lead to great suffering and death. This pandemic has already taken a heavy toll on our country.

A total of 800,872 people are confirmed to have been infected by the virus in South Africa since March.

Around 92 per cent of these people have recovered.

As of today, 21,803 people are known to have died from COVID-19 in South Africa.

For nearly 100 days, since the middle of August, we managed to keep the rate of new infections stable, at below 2,000 new cases a day.

However, that has changed in the last three weeks.

There has been a marked rise in new infections and an increase in the number of people being admitted to hospital.

In the first week of November, we were recording an average of 1,500 new cases a day.

By the last week of November, this had almost doubled to an average of around 2,900 new cases a day.

Yesterday, South Africa recorded over 4,400 new infections, the largest daily increase in infections since the middle of August.

The total number of hospital admissions is now over 5,800 nationally and is increasing.

Three weeks ago hospital admissions were 4,900.

There are three areas of the country that account for most of these new infections.

These are Nelson Mandela Bay and the Sarah Baartman District in the Eastern Cape and the Garden Route District in the Western Cape.

Hospital admissions in these districts are on the rise, in some instances comparable to those during the first wave of infections.

In the Eastern Cape and Western Cape there has been an increase in both reported COVID-19 deaths and excess deaths.

This must be a concern for every one of us.

There are a number of reasons for the rise in transmission.

Many people are travelling between provinces and within each province in higher numbers, especially with the festive season approaching.

In the case of the Garden Route, this also applies to the movement of seasonal workers who work in one province and live in another province.

Social, cultural and religious gatherings are being held in large numbers.

In many cases these gatherings are often attended by many more people than what is permitted under Level 1 restrictions. What is concerning is that these are also often held in venues with poor ventilation.

This is particularly the case for funerals, which are often followed by large so-called “after tears” parties.

Several hospitals in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro have reported a rise in alcohol-related trauma admissions.

As we have said in the past these alcohol-related trauma admissions divert capacity that is needed to deal with Covid-related cases.

But by far the greatest contributing cause of infections is that many people are not wearing masks, and are not observing proper hygiene and social distancing.

As I said during our last family meeting, at alert level 1, we have the measures we need to control the virus.

But our main problem is that there are parts of the country where people are not complying with the current restrictions and the basic prevention measures are not being followed.

The most urgent task before us right now is to contain the rise in infections in the affected districts in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape, and to ensure that a similar situation does not develop in other parts of the country.

To prevent this we are putting into motion the resurgence plan that we developed with the World Health Organization's surge team.

We are making more capacity available at hospitals and clinics in these areas.

We are expanding public health interventions such as testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine.

We are also stepping up our awareness campaigns around public health regulations.

Fellow South Africans,

We must change our behaviour now to prevent a resurgence of the virus and manage outbreaks wherever they occur.

If we think of this pandemic like a bush fire, we need to quickly extinguish the flare ups before they turn into an inferno.

At the same time, we need to do all we can to keep the economy open and to push ahead with our reconstruction and recovery effort.

In line with our differentiated approach to the management of the pandemic, we will therefore implement additional measures in those areas identified as coronavirus hotspots.

When identifying a hotspot, consideration is given to the number of new COVID-19 cases per day, the testing rate within the population, the percentage positivity rate within the population, the number of active cases, the number of hospital admissions and the number of deaths.

Following a recommendation of the National Coronavirus Command Council and after consultation with Premiers, metro mayors and traditional leaders, Cabinet has decided to declare the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality a coronavirus hotspot.

In addition to the existing Alert Level 1 regulations, the following additional restrictions will apply in Nelson Mandela Bay Metro with effect from midnight tonight:

- The hours of the curfew will be from 10pm and 4am.

This means that – except for emergencies – no person may be outside their place of residence between those times.

This does not apply to essential workers who are permitted to work during those hours.

- The sale of alcohol from retail outlets will only be permitted between 10am and 6pm from Monday to Thursday.
- Alcohol consumption in public spaces, such as beaches and parks, is strictly forbidden. This is necessary to prevent large social gatherings.

- Gatherings – including religious gatherings – may not be attended by more than 100 people for indoor events and 250 for outdoor events.

At all times, the total number of people in a venue may not exceed more than 50% of the capacity of the venue.

- Finally, all post-funeral gatherings are prohibited.

These additional measures are necessary to contain the resurgence in Nelson Mandela Bay, to prevent outbreaks resulting from social gatherings and to protect the capacity of the healthcare system to provide care to those who need it.

In determining these restrictions, we have sought to take those steps which are absolutely necessary to save lives while limiting disruptions to the economy.

Following extensive consultation with traditional leaders, we have agreed that the summer initiation season in the Eastern Cape may go ahead.

This is because traditional leaders in the Eastern Cape have submitted a risk adjusted plan that has been approved by Departments of Health and Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs.

This plan includes strict adherence to health protocols, including screening of initiates, the provision of personal protective equipment and the provision of water for hygiene and to prevent dehydration.

However, due to the high rates of infection in the metro, no initiation schools will be allowed in Nelson Mandela Bay.

The measures that are being taken in Nelson Mandela Bay are not meant to punish its residents.

They are not intended to increase the hardship experienced by our citizens.

These measures are needed to contain the spread of the virus and to save lives. In the coming days the Minister of Health will be visiting the Sarah Baartman District and the Garden Route to assess the situation and to engage with various stakeholders in the province.

Based on this assessment and the development of the disease in these areas, the National Coronavirus Command Council will determine the appropriate course of action.

To ensure that we maintain the current prevention measures, the National State of Disaster will be extended to the 15th of January 2021 in line with the Disaster Management Act.

All existing Level 1 restrictions remain in force throughout the country.

We have all the tools we need to prevent a resurgence in the rest of the country.

We can only do this if everyone plays their part.

We can only prevent a second wave if all of us respect the rules that have been put in place for the protection of everyone.

For the safety of all of us, those who break the rules must face consequences.

We have instructed law enforcement officials to ensure compliance with the law, by owners, controllers and managers of workplaces, shops, institutions and buildings to ensure social distancing and wearing of masks.

Taxi operators are also required to ensure that all their passengers wear masks.

In addition, each one of us will be required to comply with the curfew times.

Together with the measures to contain a resurgence in hotspot areas, the national effort continues to strengthen public health interventions such as community screening, increased testing, contact tracing and communication on behavioural change.

As we have said in the past the only viable defence we will have against Covid-19 will be the vaccine.

There are now many initiatives in the world to speed up the development of a vaccine.

We continue to collaborate with our partners in the international community to ensure that all countries have access to an effective and affordable vaccine.

We are participating in the World Health Organization's COVID-19 Global Vaccine Access Facility – known as the Covax facility – which aims to pool resources and share vaccine development risk and thus ensure equitable access to vaccines when they become available.

We are encouraged that the Solidarity Fund will be making the initial contribution of R327 million towards this vaccine procurement on behalf of our country.

We are also encouraged by the promising results from three trials of candidate vaccines, which have shown efficacy levels of between 70 and 95 per cent.

We await confirmation from medicine regulators that these vaccines are safe, effective and suitable for our needs.

In South Africa, our own Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) will review the approval applications when received from the developers and authorise their use.

But let us remember that until a vaccine is developed and distributed, we remain our own best protection against COVID-19.

It is through our everyday actions that we will keep ourselves and others safe.

It is through wearing a mask in public at all times.

It is by observing social distancing and avoiding large gatherings and indoor spaces where ventilation is poor.

It is through regularly washing or sanitising our hands.

We can also protect ourselves by downloading the Covid Alert SA mobile app that can notify us if we are exposed to the virus and thereby help to break the chain of transmission.

It is extremely encouraging that the Covid Alert SA app has now been downloaded by a million South Africans.

If there is anything this pandemic has taught us, it is the danger of becoming complacent.

Across the world, countries with declining infections have eased restrictions only to experience a second, even more severe wave, forcing them to reimpose restrictions on movement, gatherings and economic activity.

If there was ever a time for caution, it is now.

The festive season is approaching.

Schools and places of higher learning have closed for the summer holidays.

Many of you are winding down at work and will soon be at home with your families.

Many of you are preparing to travel to reunite with friends and relatives.

Travel carries great risks, which we can reduce by avoiding unnecessary travel.

We can also reduce infection risk by wearing a mask in public transport, keeping the vehicle windows open and maintaining prevention measures on arrival.

The summer season is traditionally a time for social gatherings, attending festivals and events, and socialising at weddings, religious gatherings and in both public and private spaces.

These social gatherings can be 'super-spreader' events that carry a huge risk of transmission of the virus.

Each of us needs to ensure we take precautions to avoid spreading the virus to our families, especially our elders.

We should keep gatherings small, have them outside or in well ventilated venues, ensure social distancing and wear masks as much as possible.

We must remember that as much as we want to relax, this virus does not take a holiday.

This has been a difficult year for us as a country.

It has severely tested our resolve and demanded great sacrifices of each and every one of us.

But even as the holidays approach, we cannot let our guard down.

Unless we take personal responsibility for our health and the health of others, more people are going to become infected. More people are going to die.

Over the last 8 months, many people have lost parents, siblings, spouses, friends and colleagues to COVID-19.

As a nation, we have lost many brave frontline workers who were caring for those in hospitals and clinics.

We have lost essential services workers who helped to keep this country running during the lockdown.

We have lost teachers who went to school every day to support our children and to ensure our matriculants were able to write their final exams.

We owe it to all those whose lives have been so tragically cut short by this deadly virus not to let the same suffering and pain be visited on even more families.

We owe it to our own friends and relatives and those around us.

We owe it to our country, because a resurgence of the virus would be a severe setback to our economic recovery, to our efforts to restore and create jobs, and to our provision of services to the people.

Most of all we owe it to ourselves and each other, because this affects us all.

Tonight we stand in solidarity with the people of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro as they work to contain this outbreak.

I have the utmost confidence that the leadership of the Eastern Cape is doing and will do all that is necessary to bring the rate of infection down once again.

I call on each and every one of you to remember those whose lives have been lost and the precious lives we have still to save.

Over the past eight months, we succeeded in bringing the virus under control by acting together.

We fought this pandemic with everything that we had.

Through our combined efforts, we saved many thousands of lives which would otherwise have been needlessly lost.

Now, as the number of infections begins to rise again, we cannot sacrifice the gains that we made.

We cannot return to the darker days of June and July, when transmission of the virus was widespread and the lives of our family and friends were at risk.

Just as we know that a second wave is possible, we know too that it is not inevitable.

So tonight, I am asking you to recommit yourself to this fight.

We can still prevent the virus from spreading any further if we take the appropriate steps now.

Just as we did in the early days of the pandemic, let us stand together and let us work together.

We will get through this period of difficulty as we did the ones before.

May God Bless South Africa and protect her people.

I thank you.