

Coronavirus COVID-19 Nationwide Lockdown Extended Until End of April - Summary

The Coronavirus COVID-19 nationwide lockdown has been extended until the end of April 2020.

Speaking to the nation last night, president Ramaphosa announced that the National Coronavirus Command Council, after careful consideration of the available evidence, has decided to extend the nationwide lockdown by a further two weeks.

The president thanked South Africans for their cooperation, commitment and patience in dealing with the challenges posed by the lockdown.

“I wish to thank you for reaffirming to each other and to the world that we South Africans are a people who come together and unite at moments of great crisis” he said.

The president declared that global evidence on the pandemic confirms that the decision to declare a national state of disaster and to institute a nationwide lockdown was correct and timely.

The average daily increase in new cases has dropped from around 42% in the two weeks prior to the lockdown to around 4% since the start of the lockdown.

According to the president, measures taken such as closing the borders and prohibiting gatherings coupled with changes in personal behaviour have definitely slowed the spread of the virus.

However, the struggle against the coronavirus was far from over and South Africa was “only at the beginning of a monumental struggle that demands our every resource and our every effort”.

South Africa needed to extend its response and expand the reach of its interventions over the coming months.

Ending the lockdown too soon or too abruptly will “risk a massive and uncontrollable resurgence of the disease”.

The president indicated that, therefore, most of the existing lockdown measures will remain in force until the end of April.

“We will use the coming days to evaluate how we will embark on risk-adjusted measures that can enable a phased recovery of the economy, allowing the return to operation of certain sectors under strictly controlled conditions”, he said.

Government’s strategy going forward includes an intensified public health response to slow down and reduce infections; a comprehensive package of economic support measures to assist businesses and individuals affected by the pandemic and a programme of increased social support to protect poor and vulnerable households.

The community screening and testing programme will be rolled out over the next two weeks in all provinces with particular focus on highly vulnerable communities.

Developments so far in the fight against COVID-19 include:

- Setting up of the COVID-19 Information Centre at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research designed to keep track of all screening, testing, isolation and hospitalization throughout the country.
- The Unemployment Insurance Fund has made R40 billion available to help employees unable to work in order to prevent jobs losses as a result of the lockdown – so far R356 million has been paid out.
- The Industrial Development Corporation has set aside R3 billion for the procurement of essential

medical supplies - R130 million in funding has already been approved and a further R400 million in the pipeline over the coming week to companies who applied for funding under this special facility.

- The Small Enterprise Finance Agency has approved the postponement of loan repayments for a period of 6 months.
- R1.2 billion reprioritized to provide relief to smallholder farmers and to contribute to food security.
- National Ventilator Project established to rapidly mobilise technical and industrial resources to manufacture non-invasive ventilators for infected patients.
- The Solidarity Fund has so far raised approximately R2.2 billion with R1 billion already allocated to buy sterile gloves, face shields, surgical masks, test kits and ventilators.

The president also announced that “cabinet will be developing a comprehensive package of urgent economic measures to respond both to the immediate crisis and to the severe economic challenges that we must confront in the months ahead”.

The next phase of government’s economic and social support strategy will be announced in due course.

The president also declared that government has decided that the president, deputy president, ministers and deputy ministers will each take a one-third cut in their salaries for the next three months.