

Africa lockdowns begin as coronavirus cases above 1,000

March 21 2020, by Bashir Adigun, Sam Mednick and Cara Anna



A Kenyan Health Ministry official sprays disinfectant onto a hand-cart to control the spread of the new coronavirus, in the Gikomba outdoor street market in the capital Nairobi, Kenya Saturday, March 21, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms such as fever and cough and the vast majority recover in 2-6 weeks but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health issues, the virus that causes COVID-19 can result in more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/John Muchucha)

Lockdowns have begun in Africa as coronavirus cases rise above 1,000, while Nigeria on Saturday announced it is closing airports to all incoming international flights for one month in the continent's most populous country.

Rwanda said all unnecessary movements outside the home are banned for two weeks as of midnight except for essential services such as [health care](#) and shopping. The East African nation, which has 17 cases, has told all public and private employees to work from home. Tunisia earlier imposed a lockdown as well.

Meanwhile, two African heads of state appeared to defy their own travel restrictions to attend another president's inauguration.

Eritrea and Angola announced first cases, meaning 41 of Africa's 54 countries are now affected. Congo reported its first death; Burkina Faso reported two new ones. Uganda is closing its borders to all but cargo. Ethiopia said all arriving passengers will face mandatory quarantine as of Monday. Somalia said it's lifting its ban on [international flights](#) for two days so stranded citizens can come home.

Nigeria's international flight ban came a day after Africa's busiest airport, in Johannesburg, blocked foreigners from disembarking and two major airlines—Ethiopian Airlines and South African Airways—announced sweeping cancellations of international flights.



Iftikhar Ahmad, a Pakistani shopkeeper, is one of the very few wearing a mask in the Diepsloot township north of Johannesburg, South Africa, Saturday March 21, 2020. For most people the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For others it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

The announcement came shortly after Nigeria reported its first cases in the capital, Abuja.

The Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority said "emergency and essential" flights are exempt from the ban that starts Monday. An adviser to President Muhammadu Buhari, Bashir Ahmad, said Nigeria also plans to suspend all passenger rail services starting then.

While Angola closed its air, land and sea borders this week, Namibian media showed President Joao Lourenco at Saturday's inauguration of Namibian President Hage Geingob. Also in attendance was President Mokgweetsi Masisi of neighboring Botswana, which this week suspended international travel by all [government employees](#). Namibia has three cases.

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa also was there. He announced a national disaster even before his country confirmed its first virus case on Friday. On Saturday, his country announced the first case in the capital, Harare.



A woman wearing a face mask walks nearby the Central Mosque in Lagos, Nigeria, Friday, March 20, 2020. The government banned all religious activities for four weeks following confirmation of coronavirus cases in the country. (AP Photo/Sunday Alamba)

Africa now has more than 1,100 cases, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a new update late Saturday afternoon.

Burkina Faso now has the most virus deaths of any country in sub-Saharan Africa. The West African nation has one of the highest caseloads on the continent with 64.

Several government ministers in Burkina Faso have tested positive, including the minister of foreign affairs. On Friday, President Roch Marc Christian Kabore announced the country's two international airports would close for two weeks with the exception for military and cargo.

Burkina Faso is one of Africa's most fragile states with a growing humanitarian crisis caused by attacks linked to Islamic extremists. More than 130 [health centers](#) have closed, affecting more than 1.5 million people, the government and aid groups say.



Thabo Rakgotho, a pharmacist, waits for customers in the Diepsloot township north of Johannesburg, South Africa, Saturday March 21, 2020. For most people the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For others it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

According to a government response plan seen by The Associated Press, emergency teams aren't trained for a respiratory disease outbreak and don't have appropriate protective gear.

There's also insufficient screening at borders. None of Burkina Faso's 44 high-flow entry points have the needed personal protective equipment, and only 23% have [coronavirus](#) screening devices.

Jerry-Jonas Mbasha, cluster coordinator for the World Health Organization in Burkina Faso, said he was "much worried about what might happen in the next one week, two weeks from now."

Most people only experience minor flu-like symptoms from the coronavirus and recover within a few weeks, but the virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear well. It can cause severe illness, including pneumonia, in some patients, particularly those with underlying health problems.



Mabatho Mphuthi is one of the very few people wearing a mask in response to the COVID-19 virus outbreak in the Diepsloot township north of Johannesburg, South Africa, Saturday March 21, 2020. For most people the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For others it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems. (AP

Photo/Jerome Delay)



Iftikhar Ahmad, a Pakistani shopkeeper, is one of the very few wearing a mask in the Diepsloot township north of Johannesburg, South Africa, Saturday March 21, 2020. At right is Prince, a Nigerian money changer. For most people the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For others it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)



Prince, a Nigerian money changer, is one of the very few people wearing a mask in response to the COVID-19 virus outbreak in the Diepsloot township north of Johannesburg, South Africa, Saturday March 21, 2020. For most people the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For others it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)



A newspaper headline reports on the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus in a Johannesburg suburb, Saturday March 21, 2020. For most people the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Cara Anna)



Street traders wash their hands as they watch Kenyan Health Ministry officials spraying disinfectant to control the spread of the new coronavirus, in the Gikomba outdoor street market in the capital Nairobi, Kenya Saturday, March 21, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms such as fever and cough and the vast majority recover in 2-6 weeks but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health issues, the virus that causes COVID-19 can result in more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/John Muchucha)



A woman wearing a face mask walks on the street, opposite the Central mosque in Lagos, Nigeria, Friday, March 20, 2020. The government banned all religious activities for four weeks following confirmation of coronavirus cases in the country. (AP Photo/ Sunday Alamba)



In a normally crowded shopping mall a couple push their shopping trolleys across the centre court at the Sandton City shopping mall in Johannesburg, South Africa, Saturday March 21, 2020. There is a noticeable drop in crowds of shoppers at malls due the spread of the coronavirus. For most people the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Denis Farrell)



A Muslim man sleeps outside the central mosque in Lagos, Nigeria, Friday, March 20, 2020. The government banned all religious activities for four weeks following confirmation of coronavirus cases in the country. (AP Photo/Sunday Alamba)



Kenyan Health Ministry officials spray disinfectant onto the steel door of a street stall to control the spread of the new coronavirus, in the Gikomba outdoor street market in the capital Nairobi, Kenya Saturday, March 21, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms such as fever and cough and the vast majority recover in 2-6 weeks but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health issues, the virus that causes COVID-19 can result in more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/John Muchucha)



A woman sells herbal medicine from the back of a car, outside the Central Mosque in Lagos, Nigeria, Friday, March 20, 2020. The government banned all religious activities for four weeks following confirmation of coronavirus cases in the country. (AP Photo/ Sunday Alamba)

More than 275,000 cases have been confirmed globally, including over 11,000 deaths, according to a running tally by Johns Hopkins University. At least 88,000 people have recovered.

In Nigeria, which just three weeks ago announced the first coronavirus case in sub-Saharan Africa, authorities said that first patient, a man who had traveled from Italy, was now fit to go home.

In Kenya, health officials continued to disinfect crowded markets in the

capital, Nairobi, trying to stop the virus' spread.

"It's for the sake of us, it's for the sake of the country," said Simon Kimani, public health council chairman.

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