

S.Africa coronavirus model projects 40,000 deaths

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Scientists say more than a million people in South Africa could be infected by coronavirus, causing at least 40,000 deaths, by the time the disease reaches a likely peak in the country in November.

A consortium called the Modelling and Simulation Hub Africa (MASHA), comprising experts from the University of Cape Town and the Department of Health, released its first projections of the impact of the pandemic late Tuesday.

In an optimistic scenario there would be just over 40,000 deaths by November, said MASHA's head, Sheetal Silal.

In a pessimistic scenario, the [death toll](#) would be 45,000-48,000, she said.

Silal stressed the wide degree of uncertainty for making forecasts at this stage.

"Here we are trying to make projections on the entire span of the epidemic for the next six to eight months, so there is considerable uncertainty," she said.

South Africa reporting its first coronavirus case on March 5.

Its registered tally now stands at 17,200 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 312 deaths, in a country of 57 million.

The country has observed a lockdown, restricting movement of persons and [business operations](#), in a bid to slow the spread.

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced last week that the country would ease restrictions from June, allowing certain sectors of the economy to return to work. The education ministry has also announced the reopening of schools from June.

The new model projects 30,000 detected cases across the country by the end of May and highlights the challenge of providing beds in intensive

care units (ICUs) for the most severely ill.

Between 20,000-35,000 ICU patients are expected between June and November, according to the model.

By comparison, there are 125,390 general beds and roughly 4,000 ICU beds available in the public and [private sector](#) and a further 6,500 are being added, according to Health Minister Zweli Mkhize.

Mkhize has warned that the infection rate has to slow before South Africa can lift the lockdown in line with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.

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