

South Africa's surge of virus cases expected to rise rapidly

June 28 2020, by Andrew Meldrum



In this Friday June 19, 2020, a woman wearing a face mask passes a coronavirus billboard carrying a message in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus. South Africa's Health Minister Zwelini Mkhize said Sunday June 28, 2020 the country's current surge of COVID-19 cases is expected to dramatically increase in the coming weeks and press the country's hospitals to the limit. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe/File)

South Africa's current surge of COVID-19 cases is expected to dramatically increase in the coming weeks and press the country's hospitals to the limit, the health minister said Sunday night.

South Africa, a country of 57 million people, already has more than a third of the reported cases for all 54 countries in Africa, a continent of 1.3 billion people.

More than 4,300 people have been hospitalized out of South Africa's 138,000 confirmed cases, Health Minister Zwelini Mkhize said in a statement. He warned this number is expected to rise quickly.

"We are seeing a rapid rise in the cumulative number of positive COVID-19 cases indicating that, as we had expected, we are approaching a surge during the ... months of July and August," Mkhize said in a statement.

"It is anticipated that while every province will unfortunately witness an increase in their numbers, areas where there is high economic activity will experience an exponential rise," said Mkhize, saying that the cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban will see the biggest increases.

After two months of a strict lockdown, South Africa at the beginning of June began lifting restrictions to allow economic activity, as the shutdown had dramatically increased unemployment and hunger, in a country rated as the world's most unequal.

The current rise in infections has come from people who "moved back into the workplace. It was therefore inevitable that there would be cluster outbreaks as infections spilled over from communities into places of congregation such as mines, factories, taxis and buses," Mkhize said.



In this Wednesday June 17, 2020, file photo a health worker in personal protective gear takes a break at the Netcare Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa. South Africa's Health Minister Zwelini Mkhize said, Sunday, June 18, 2020, that the country's current surge of COVID-19 cases is expected to dramatically increase in the coming weeks and press the country's hospitals to the limit. (AP Photo/Nardus Engelbrecht/File)

Of the more than 4,300 people hospitalized for COVID-19, 80% are in general wards and about 15% of them are getting high flow oxygen treatment. About 11% of those hospitalized have severe cases and are in intensive care and of those more than 58% are on ventilation, Mkhize said. He said that the steroid dexamethasone is being given to the most critically ill patients.

He said that South Africa has built several field hospitals, including in convention centers, a car manufacturing plant and by building large tented structures. The field hospitals have increased the hospital bed capacity for COVID-19 to 27,000, Mkhize said.

Most of the critically ill are the elderly and those with conditions such as [high blood pressure](#), diabetes, HIV, cardiac disease, [chronic kidney disease](#), cancer malignancy and obesity, the [health minister](#) said.

He said that the mortality rate for those hospitalized is about 1.8% to 2.1%.

As cases numbers are expected to rapidly rise across South Africa, Mkhize urged everyone to follow precautions.

"We are extremely concerned that fatigue seems to have set in and South Africans are letting down their guard at a time when the spread of infection is surging," Mkhize said.

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Citation: South Africa's surge of virus cases expected to rise rapidly (2020, June 28) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-south-africa-surge-virus-cases.html>

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