

South Africa on verge of new virus rules as it hits 1M cases

December 27 2020, by Andrew Meldrum



Members of the Saaberie Chishty Burial Society prepare the grave for the burial of a person who died from COVID-19 at the Avalon Cemetery in Lenasia, Johannesburg Saturday Dec. 26, 2020. South Africa's health minister has announced an "alarming rate of spread" in the country, with more than 14,000 new confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 400 deaths reported Wednesday. It was the largest single-day increase in cases. (AP Photo/Shiraz Mohamed)

South Africa's COVID-19 spike has taken the country to more than 1 million confirmed cases on Sunday and President Cyril Ramaphosa called an emergency meeting of the National Coronavirus Command Council.

The country's new variant of the [coronavirus](#), 501.V2, is more contagious and has quickly become dominant in many areas of the resurgence, according to experts.

With South Africa's hospitals reaching capacity and no sign of the new surge reaching a peak, Ramaphosa is expected to announce a return to restrictive measures designed to slow the spread of the disease.

"We are not helpless in the face of this variant," infectious disease specialist Dr. Richard Lessells told The Associated Press. "We can change our behavior to give the virus less opportunities to spread." He said it's most important to avoid contact with others in indoor, enclosed spaces.

South Africa announced a cumulative total of 1,004,431 confirmed cases of COVID-19 on Sunday evening. That number includes 26,735 deaths in a country of 60 million people.

"One million cases is a serious milestone, but the true number of cases and deaths is almost certainly much higher," Lessells said.

"We have seen the new variant spread rapidly," he said, pointing out that genomic sequencing shows it has become dominant in the coastal provinces of Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. It is not yet certain if the variant is as dominant in the inland Gauteng province, which includes Johannesburg and is the country's most populous

province.



Members of the Saaberie Chishty Burial Society prepare the body of a person who died from COVID-19 at the Avalon Cemetery in Lenasia, Johannesburg Saturday Dec. 26, 2020. South Africa's health minister has announced an "alarming rate of spread" in the country, with more than 14,000 new confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 400 deaths reported Wednesday. It was the largest single-day increase in cases. (AP Photo/Shiraz Mohamed)

"As people return from holidays at [coastal areas](#), we can expect them to bring the variant with them," said Lessells. "We can also expect travelers to take the variant with them across the borders to other African countries."

The mutation of the COVID-19 virus has made it bind more efficiently to cells within our bodies, say experts.

Vaccinations haven't yet reached South Africa, although Ramaphosa has said that he expects 10% of the country's 60 million people to be inoculated in the first months of 2021.



A member of the Saaberie Chishty Burial Society cleans a wash table as others, background, prepare the body of a person who died from COVID-19 at the Avalon Cemetery in Lenasia, Johannesburg Saturday Dec. 26, 2020. South Africa's health minister has announced an "alarming rate of spread" in the country, with more than 14,000 new confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 400 deaths reported Wednesday. It was the largest single-day increase in cases. (AP Photo/Shiraz Mohamed)

South Africa's seven-day rolling average of daily new cases has nearly doubled over the past two weeks from 10.24 new cases per 100,000 people on Dec. 12 to 19.86 new cases per 100,000 people on Dec. 26. The number of deaths has also nearly doubled with the seven-day rolling average of daily deaths in South Africa has risen over the past two weeks from 0.25 deaths per 100,000 people on Dec. 12 to 0.48 deaths per 100,000 people on Dec. 26.

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