

# S.Africa 'largely' passes third wave peak, eases restrictions

July 25 2021

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South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Sunday said the country had "largely" passed the peak of its third coronavirus wave and eased restrictions, including a ban on alcohol sales.

The African country worst hit by the virus went back into a partial

lockdown last month to stem a surge in COVID-19 cases widely attributed to the highly transmissible Delta variant.

Ramaphosa on Sunday said the average number of daily new infections had stood around 12,000 over the past week, a 20 percent drop from the previous week.

"The latest figures suggest that we have largely passed the peak of the third wave of infections, although there are areas in the country where we still need to be concerned," the president said in an address to the nation.

While new daily cases have declined steadily in the most populous Gauteng province—the third wave's epicentre—infections are still rising in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape provinces, he cautioned.

But Ramaphosa still announced the easing of restrictions on gatherings, in-country travel and alcohol sales with almost immediate effect.

A nighttime curfew remains in place and face masks are still mandatory, he added.

Schools closed for the winter vacation are also permitted to reopen as scheduled on Monday.

To date South Africa has recorded over 2.3 million coronavirus cases—more than a third of all recorded cases in Africa—of which at least 69,775 have been fatal.

## **Ailing businesses**

Inoculation against COVID-19 has been sluggish and hit by several

setbacks, including the scrapping of AstraZeneca shots after a study suggested the formula was less effective against the local Beta variant.

Just over 2.3 million people have been fully vaccinated since February out of a 2022 target of 40 million—which would be around 67 percent of the population.

Ramaphosa said the inoculation programme had "made huge strides", with over 240,000 jabs administered each week day, up from around 100,000 last month.

He vowed to increase vaccination capacity and said people aged between 18 and 34 would be eligible for a jab from September.

Ramaphosa also extended financial support to those made vulnerable by coronavirus restrictions, and said new measures would be implemented to help businesses recover from an unrelated bout of unrest and looting this month.

The unrest—sparked by the jailing of South Africa's ex-president Jacob Zuma—left thousands of businesses destroyed and jobs at risk in an economy already in recession before the pandemic hit.

"The effect of the recent violence on investor confidence is a great threat to our recovery," Ramaphosa said, adding that troops deployed to quell the riots would remain in place for the time being.

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Citation: S.Africa 'largely' passes third wave peak, eases restrictions (2021, July 25) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-safrica-largely-peak-virus.html>

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