

Zimbabwe returns to strict lockdown to fight virus surge

July 6 2021, by Farai Mutsaka



A truck loaded with people travels on a street, in Harare, Tuesday, July, 6, 2021. Zimbabwe has reactivated strict lockdown measures it once imposed when COVID-19 first hit the country last year, as the country battles a resurgence of the virus amid vaccine shortages. Credit: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi

Zimbabwe has returned to strict lockdown measures to combat a

resurgence of COVID-19 amid vaccine shortages, the country's information minister announced Tuesday.

Infections have dramatically increased in recent weeks despite a night curfew, reduced business hours, localized lockdowns in hotspot areas, and a ban on inter-city travel. The virus has spread to rural areas which have sparse health facilities.

To try to contain the spread, most people must stay at home, similar to restrictions on movement adopted in March last year when towns and cities became almost deserted, Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa announced after a Cabinet meeting Tuesday.

People will now need letters from employers to justify why they must venture out of their neighborhoods "with [immediate effect](#)," said Mutsvangwa.

"Stiffer penalties will be imposed for violations," including revoking the licenses of offending businesses, she said.

Zimbabwe is one of more than 14 African countries where the delta variant is quickly spreading.

Infections are shooting up. Zimbabwe's 7-day rolling average of daily new cases quadrupled over the past two weeks from 2.04 new cases per 100,000 people on June 21 to 8.39 new cases per 100,000 people on July 5, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Previously the country's crowded cities were the centers of infection, but now [rural areas](#) are hard hit, said Mutsvangwa.

Government officials reported shortages of personal protective equipment, misinformation discouraging people from getting vaccines

and shortages of health care workers. Some rural district hospitals require bulk oxygen tanks, while others need "functional" isolation centers, Mutsvangwa said.

Zimbabwe is one of many African countries suffering a resurgence of the disease, in contrast to other parts of the world where vaccines have allowed a return to something like normal life. To date, 9% of Zimbabwe's 15 million people have received at least one vaccine dose and 3.7% have received two doses. Across Africa, less than 2% of the continent's 1.3 billion people have received at least one [vaccine](#) jab, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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