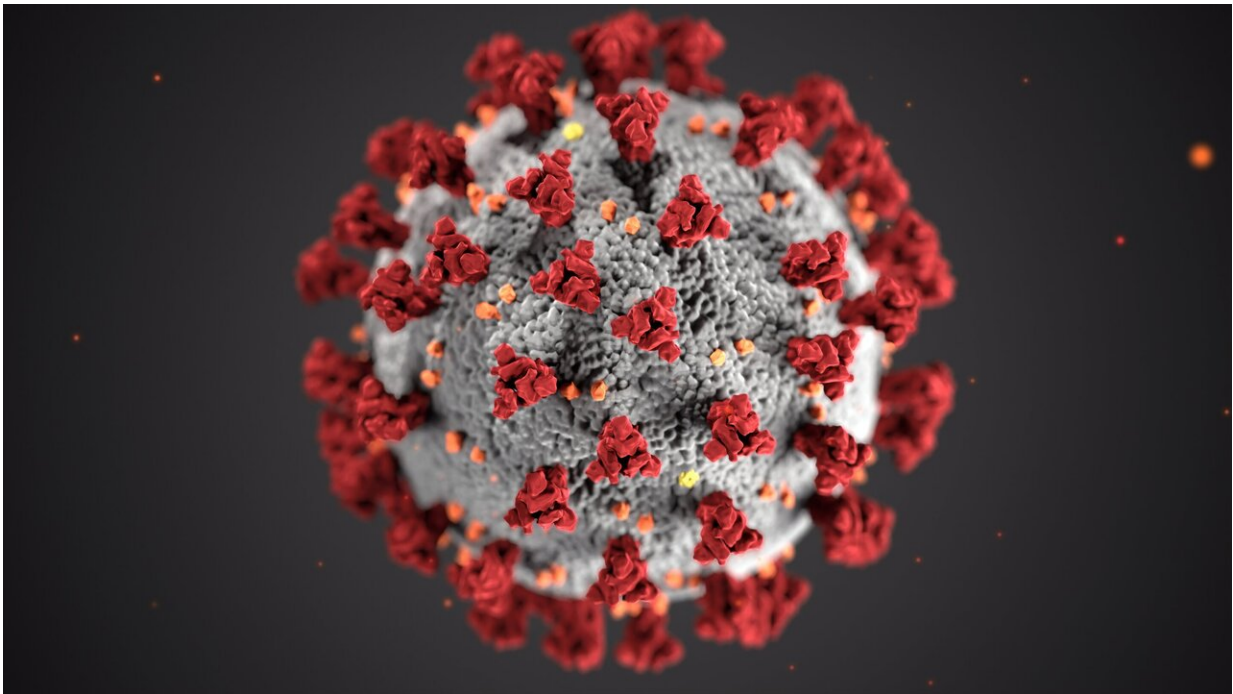


South Africa announces 'vaccine passport' plans, eases restrictions

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South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa on Sunday announced plans to introduce COVID-19 "vaccine passports" amid widespread scepticism of the jab, ahead of an easing of movement restrictions this week.

After sluggish vaccine procurement and a delayed roll out, Africa's worst-hit country for COVID is now struggling with low take-up, particularly

among men.

In a televised address to the nation, Ramaphosa stressed that an immunised adult population was key to fully reopening the economy and avoiding a fourth infection wave.

In two weeks, we will "be providing further information on an approach to 'vaccine passports', which can be used as evidence of vaccination for various purposes and events", he said without providing further details.

But he added that "a sustained decline in infections... over the last few weeks" would allow for an easing of confinement measures from Monday.

A night-time curfew will be shortened, starting at 11:00 pm instead of 10, and limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings will be increased.

Restrictions on the sale of alcohol will also be relaxed, although [face masks](#) remain mandatory in public.

Vaccination the priority

South Africa has passed the peak of a stubborn third [infection](#) wave driven by the Delta coronavirus variant, said Ramaphosa.

The average number of daily new infections has been 29 percent lower over the past seven days than during the previous week, and 48 percent lower than the week before that, he added.

"Our most urgent task is to vaccinate our population," he said, noting that job supplies "were no longer a constraint".

"If many people are not vaccinated... the chance of new and more

dangerous variants emerging is far greater," he warned.

Just over seven million people in South Africa have been fully vaccinated to date, with more than a quarter of all adults jabbed with at least one dose.

The country aims to inoculate 40 million South Africans—around two thirds of the population—by March next year.

Authorities have recorded more than 2.8 million coronavirus cases since the pandemic hit, of which at least 84,877 of been fatal.

Scientists in the country have been keeping tabs on a new homegrown variant with an unusually high mutation rate dubbed C.1.2., although its frequency remains low.

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