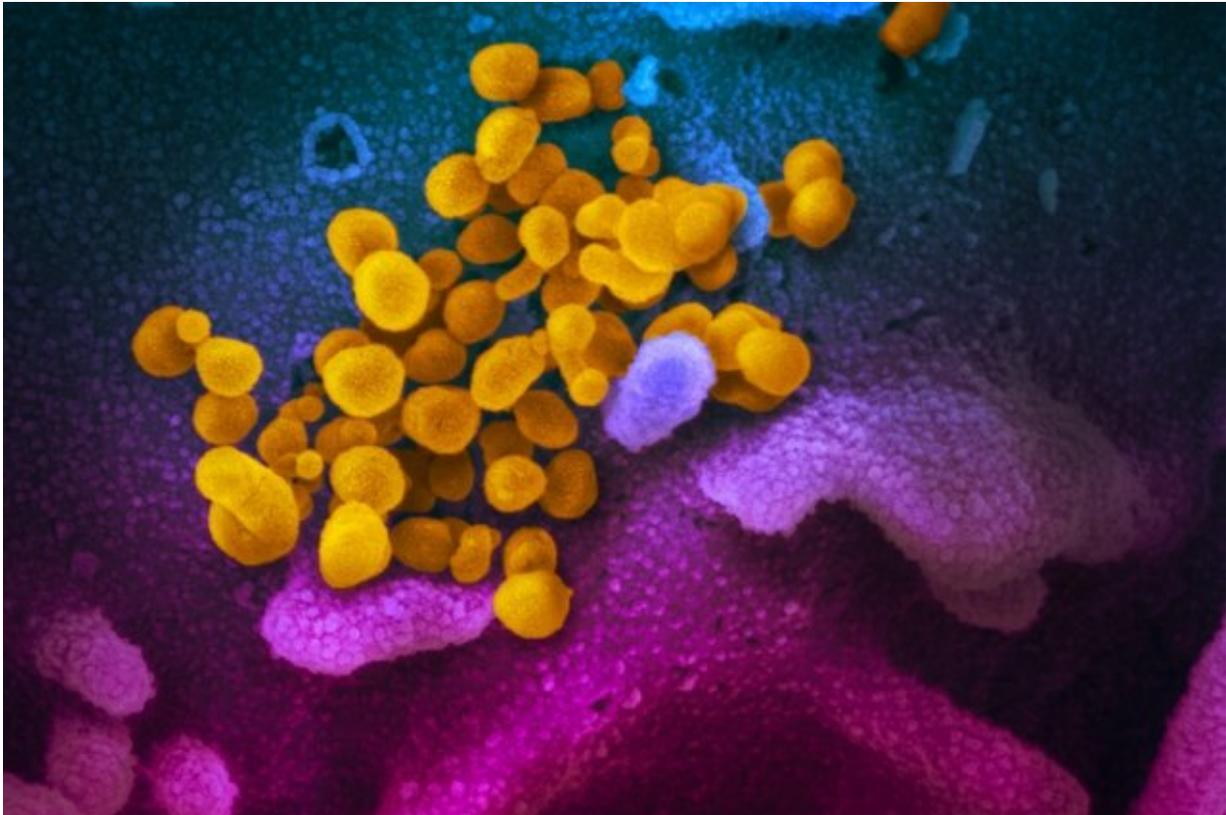


Lockdown in 3 Madagascar cities set to ease

April 20 2020



This scanning electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 (yellow)—also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19—isolated from a patient, emerging from the surface of cells (blue/pink) cultured in the lab. Credit: NIAID-RML

The coronavirus lockdown imposed in Madagascar's three main cities was to be progressively lifted from Monday, President Andry Rajoelina

said, adding that a Malgache "remedy" for the disease had been successfully tested.

"We are going to progressively re-establish normal life for the people and their means of subsistence," Rajoelina said in a TV address late Sunday.

"We are going to start by doing for it for half a day, in the mornings from 6:00 am to 1:00 pm."

The confinement measures apply to the capital Antananarivo, Fianarantsoa in the centre of the island, and Toamasina, in the east.

In a first step, [public transport](#) will resume in Antananarivo on Monday, and some [school classes](#) would begin on Wednesday, the president said.

However, people will not be allowed "to leave their city" and everyone will have to wear masks when they go out, or face being punished with community service, he said.

Madagascar has recorded 121 cases of [coronavirus](#), but no fatalities.

Rajoelina in his speech also said that a "remedy" based on the plant artemisia, which he had put forward 10 days earlier as a potential treatment, had passed tests.

"Today, I officially announce the success and good results from the tests of our remedy," he said.

"We can say that it provides a conclusive result for COVID-19 patients in Madagascar and can mitigate the impact on the human body."

The president has previously made claims about herbal remedies despite

scientific opinion that no cure for COVID-19 exists and that any experimental formula should be rigorously tested to see if it is safe and effective.

Rajoelina said his claimed remedy, named COVID-Organics and produced by the Malgache Institute of Applied Research (IMFA), would be prescribed in syrup form "to all school children, to help to protect themselves against the pandemic."

The coronavirus outbreak has triggered a rush for herbal formulas, lemons and ginger in Madagascar in the belief that they can protect against the virus.

Rajoelina last month encouraged the use of alternative remedies as a way of "strengthening the antibodies" to coronavirus.

"We will make patients inhale ravintsara essential oils and provide them with high-calorie foods... in conjunction with medicine," he said at the time.

Full details of the tests described by Rajoelina were not immediately available.

Artemisia also provides the [active ingredient](#) in artemisinin, a frontline treatment against malaria.

The UN's World Health Organization (WHO) has urged scepticism over claimed cures for COVID-19.

Two other malaria drugs—hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine—are now being widely tested after US President Donald Trump backed their use.

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC), referring to claims for herbal or tea remedies, says: "There is no [scientific evidence](#) that any of these alternative remedies can prevent or cure the illness caused by COVID-19. In fact, some of them may not be safe to consume."

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