

Fighting COVID-19 surge, South Africa increases restrictions

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In this Monday, March 29, 2021 file photo South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, right, heads a government delegation on a visit to ASPEN Pharmaceuticals in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The country's COVID-19 vaccine rollout has been hit by further delays as it will have to discard at least 2 million Johnson & Johnson vaccines produced in the country.. Credit: AP Photo,file

Confronted with a rapid surge of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, South Africa has returned to tighter restrictions on public gatherings and liquor sales, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced Tuesday night.

The new infections threaten the [health systems](#) in several parts of the country, said Ramaphosa in a nationally televised address.

Hospital admissions due to COVID-19 have increased by 59% over the past two weeks, according to Ramaphosa. South Africa's 7-day rolling average of daily new cases has nearly doubled over the past two weeks from 6.69 new cases per 100,000 people on May 31 to 12.71 new cases per 100,000 people on June 14, according to Johns Hopkins University.

"Our priority now is to make sure there are enough hospital beds, enough health workers, enough ventilators, and enough oxygen to give the best possible care to every person who needs it," said Ramaphosa.

"The massive surge in new infections means that we must once again tighten restrictions on the movement of persons and gatherings," he said.

The nightly curfew has been extended by an hour from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. while religious gatherings indoors are now limited to 50 people. The number of people allowed to gather for [social events](#) has been limited to 50 people for indoor events and 100 people for outdoor events.

The retail sale of alcohol will only be permitted between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. from Monday through Thursday.

South Africa has been the country hardest hit by the pandemic in the entire continent, with a cumulative total of more than 1.7 million infections, including 57,000 deaths, accounting for nearly 40% of Africa's total confirmed cases.

The new restrictions come as South Africa also battles to sustain a vaccination drive that has faced delays from global vaccines shortages and this week the news that it must discard 2 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine due to factory contamination in the United States.

Johnson & Johnson had promised to deliver 2 million of its single-shot doses by the end of June, but that is now viewed as in jeopardy because of the recent ruling by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that a large amount of J&J vaccines were contaminated by a problem at a factory producing a component of the vaccine. About 480,000 of South Africa's health care workers have been vaccinated with J&J doses.

Doses of the Pfizer vaccine are being used to inoculate people aged 60 and over. About 1.4 million people have received their first dose of the Pfizer [vaccine](#). According to Ramaphosa, South Africa is expecting to receive 3.1 million Pfizer doses by the end of June.

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