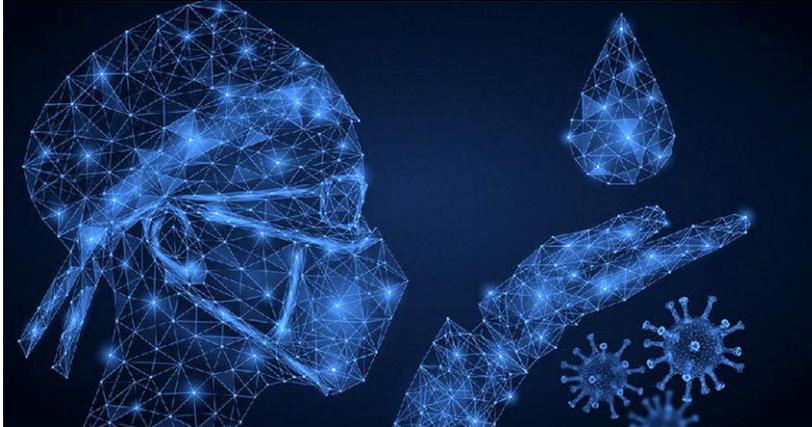


AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS ROUND-UP

Covid-19 second wave ravages southern Africa

Daily Maverick By Arnold Tsunga, Tatenda Mazarura and Mark Heywood

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On 7 January 2021, the WHO reported that more than 2.9 million Covid-19 cases had been confirmed in Africa, with more than 1.6 million recoveries and 69,000 deaths. (Photo: bizcommunity.com / Wikipedia)

Over the past few weeks, authorities in southern Africa have systematically reintroduced lockdown measures amid the second wave of Covid-19. This is after a worrying resurgence of cases in several countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, eSwatini, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Infections and deaths have skyrocketed in a region where authorities thought they had escaped lightly from the world's worst outbreaks. Worryingly, the numbers of infections and fatalities seem to be worse than the first wave.

This comes as no surprise.

In October 2020, [health experts warned](#) that the continent would likely see a resurgence of the disease. By 31 October, the number of confirmed cases in Africa had reached nearly 1.8 million, with 42,000 deaths. The continent was urged by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) to brace itself. [John Nkengasong](#), head of Africa CDC told authorities: "The time for the continent to prepare for the second wave is now."

According to the [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#), health authorities in 47 African countries have registered a weekly average of 73,000 new Covid-19 infections since the end of November, compared with an average of 30,000 new weekly cases in October.

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As numbers rise again, health authorities say countries will not be able to cope with the economic fallouts of another lockdown.

A new year, a new strain, a new wave and another lockdown

Just as hopes were running high that a vaccine would finally be rolled out across the globe, the new year brought with it the devastating reality that takes us back to square one. In southern Africa, cases and deaths have skyrocketed. All this is further complicated by the emergence of a [new strain](#) which could be a game changer as experts believe it is more transmissible.

Below we provide a brief country-by-country round-up.

South Africa



Graves at Vlakfontein Cemetery on 8 January 2021 in Dunnottar, Ekurhuleni, Gauteng. According to reports, the Covid-19 pandemic has put immense pressure on a funeral industry battling to cope with the high number of burials. (Photo: Gallo Images / OJ Koloti)

On 28 December 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa [announced](#) that South Africa would move back to “adjusted” Level 3 lockdown until 15 January 2021. Earlier that month, a new highly transmissible variant of the coronavirus was [detected](#) in the country.

The [adjusted regulations included](#) an alcohol ban and the prohibition of both indoor and outdoor gatherings (except for funerals which would be limited to 50 people). It was also announced that face masks were compulsory in any public space, and those that violated this regulation would be arrested, with conviction resulting in a fine or imprisonment for six months.

The South African Medical Association [claimed](#) that the country was less prepared than it was for the first wave, arguing that little effort had been made to boost staff complements at hospitals after large numbers of healthcare workers succumbed to the coronavirus.

[The Sunday Times](#) has reported that despite being informed in September that an audit of 160 hospitals found most required urgent upgrades to patient oxygen-supply systems, the government has done little to fix the problems.

Since January 2020, South Africa has often recorded more than 20,000 new cases a day and deaths have risen markedly. Although the total number of deaths [confirmed as Covid-19](#) by the government was 32,824 (by January 11), the [Medical Research Council](#) said “excess deaths” (that is, the number of deaths above the average expected annual level) from May to 29 December 2020 now number more than 71,000.

Zimbabwe

On 2 January 2020 Zimbabwe's Vice-President Constantino Chiwenga, who is also the Health Minister, [announced](#) that the government was imposing a national lockdown with immediate effect, after a surge in Covid-19 cases over the festive season.

He said new cases had almost doubled the number of infections and that borders would be closed for 30 days, except for commercial services. However, air transport would continue as before. Informal trading was also banned for 30 days from 5 January and schools would no longer open as scheduled, save for examination classes.

"Gatherings are reduced to no more than 30 people at all funerals. All other gatherings at weddings, churches, bars, bottle stores, gymnasiums, restaurants etc are banned for 30 days," he said.

Critics have raised concern that in the absence of safety nets for the majority of Zimbabweans who rely on informal trading, the 30-day lockdown would have dire effects on poor families. The country is already struggling with a deepening economic crisis, hyperinflation and high unemployment.



Passengers crammed at the back of a truck in Harare laden with household furniture travelling to Mutoko, as very few buses operate to ferry people due to the Covid-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe. A 30-day lockdown imposed by the government began on 5 January 2021, including a curfew between 6pm and 6am to battle the rising numbers of infections. (Photo: EPA-EFE / Aaron Ufumeli)

The government has been [accused](#) by opposition parties and civil society of failing to complement the lockdown with practical public health measures such as more hospital beds, ventilators and personal protective equipment in hospitals, as well as mass testing, contact tracing, and public education.

But acting President Kembo Mohadi has [dismissed](#) claims that the government is incapacitated. Addressing a press conference on 3 January, he said it is every citizen's responsibility to prevent Covid-19 and that Zimbabweans must "choose between enjoyment and death". He also made the false claim that there are enough "ventilated beds" for the Covid-19 response.

Adding insult to injury, former Zanu-PF legislator for Chivi South, Killer Zivhu told followers on his Twitter page to buy their own ventilators and hire private doctors in case of emergency – as he did. His tweet was [widely criticised](#) as being insensitive to the suffering masses.

Meanwhile, hospitals in Zimbabwe have [reached full capacity](#). After the festive season, the numbers skyrocketed, resulting in [patients being turned away](#). At Bulawayo's Mpilo Central Hospital, a staggering 206 members of staff had [contracted the coronavirus](#) by 31 December 2020.

Private hospitals are reportedly also charging an [admission fee of \\$3,000](#) (R45,910). In a country where the average civil servant earns just \$100 a month, and the majority eke out a living in the informal sector, only the elite can afford private healthcare. The Covid-19 fight in Zimbabwe is not helped by a government that wilfully [lies and misinforms citizens](#) about its pandemic abilities.

Meanwhile, Health and Child Care Deputy Minister Dr John Mangwiro has [declared](#) the entire country a coronavirus hotspot, saying infection rates have spiked everywhere.

eSwatini

eSwatini has [strengthened](#) its lockdown regulations after an increase of Covid-19 cases. By 7 January, more than 4,000 positive cases had been recorded, with 140 deaths.

eSwatini Acting Prime Minister Themba Masuku has [announced](#) that schools will remain closed indefinitely, while international travel is only allowed for medical attention, school, work and business.

President of the Swaziland National Association of Teachers in eSwatini, Mbongwa Dlamini, [commended](#) the government for postponing the reopening of schools, saying: "As a trade union of teachers, we are saying that the government should make sure that before schools are open, the schools should be safe for teaching and learning. So if the schools are not safe for teaching and learning, it is best for the government to wait."

Social gatherings are banned, except for funerals, which are allowed a maximum of 50 attendees, for no more than two hours. Permits are required for burials beyond three days after death.

The government said it would review the regulations after 14 days – or sooner, if the situation deteriorates.

Zambia

Zambia is also firmly in the grip of the second wave, with an increase in the number of cases and at least one death a day, Minister of Health Dr Chitalu Chilufya has warned.

During a briefing on 30 December 2020, Dr Chilufya [reported](#) that 1,238 cases had been recorded in the past seven days compared with 618 cases the previous week, with 285 new cases recorded over 24 hours, and 20,422 cumulative cases since the outbreak in March 2020.

According to [Lusaka Times](#), Dr Chilufya reported that the rise in case numbers in Zambia was accompanied by an increase in the severity of the disease requiring hospitalisation and oxygen therapy. He said the new infections were more transmissible and more widely spread geographically: "Today we report that Zambia has isolated a new strain of Covid-19, which is the same as the one that was isolated in South Africa."

Despite claims by the national director for infectious diseases Dr Lloyd Mulenga that his country had [managed the pandemic "pretty well"](#) with the help of the Africa CDC, a medical doctor at the Levy Mwanawasa Teaching Hospital (one of Zambia's 12 isolation centres) has [warned of a spike in infections](#) as people relaxed their adherence to safety measures. He also expressed concern that the health ministry's weekly Covid-19 statistics were inaccurate, making people complacent.

DRC

On 17 December 2020, authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) introduced measures to stem the second wave. President Felix Tshisekedi [announced](#) that a curfew from 9pm to 5am would be imposed until further notice, while all people, except for health workers, would require special permission from provincial authorities to move about during the curfew period. Gatherings of more than 10 people were prohibited, while holidays for schools started early.

Authorities also ramped up efforts to ensure compliance of virus safety rules, particularly mask-wearing, distancing, temperature monitoring and sanitation measures.

Covid-19 tests were compulsory for domestic and international travellers.

Since the epidemic was officially declared in March 2020, the DRC has recorded 14,942 cases and 364 deaths. December, however, saw a steady increase in the infection rate, with 345 new cases declared on 16 December, mostly in the capital Kinshasa.

Malawi

After nearly two months without the government reporting any new positive cases, Malawi recorded 46 new infections on 22 December, bringing the total number of infections to 6,248, with 187 deaths. Accordingly, the government announced the [immediate closure of borders](#) for 14 days.

Minister of Health Khumbize Kandodo Chiponda announced that only essential services personnel and transport carrying essentials such as fuel and medicines would be allowed through its borders.

By 2 January, Malawi had [recorded](#) 6,712 cases including 192 deaths. Of these cases, 1,461 were imported infections while 5,251 were locally transmitted.

Namibia

On 17 December 2020, [APA News](#) reported that Namibia had [tightened Covid-19 measures](#) amid indications that the country was experiencing a second wave. President Hage Geingob said the new measures would be in place for 14 days and reviewed after 30 December. Indoor public gatherings would not exceed 50 people while outdoor events would be limited to a maximum of 100.

Namibia has recorded a total of 27,723 cases, with 251 deaths by 10 January 2021.

Botswana

On 24 December, Botswana reintroduced a nighttime curfew from 7pm to 4am until 3 January, which has been further extended to 31 January. The sale of alcohol has been suspended.

Reports indicate that Botswana has temporarily closed three border posts amid rising cases in South Africa. [SABC News](#) has reported that the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs in Botswana temporarily shut the Tlokweng, Kopfontein and Skilpadshek border posts.

The country recorded 16,050 cases and 48 deaths by 10 January 2021.

By 7 January 2021, **Angola** had [recorded](#) 413 deaths and 17,864 cases, 71% of which had been reported since 1 October 2020. This makes Angola the fourth most positive country after Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and South Africa.

Mozambique, with 172 deaths and 19,667 cases by 7 January 2021, has seen 53% of its cases reported in the second wave.

The wave of unlearnt lessons

Weak southern African economies, already reeling from several other challenges, cannot afford the deleterious effects of the second wave. One would have hoped regional authorities such as SADC would have developed a cooperative effort in tackling the pandemic.

However, as we witnessed with the congestion at Beitbridge and Lebombo border posts during the festive period, the chaotic, uncoordinated Covid-19 measures resulted not only in [non-Covid deaths](#) among the trucking community, but also an economically costly congestion of trade and commerce. Blame has been levelled at the [Zimbabwe](#) and [Botswana](#) governments, while South Africa [criticised freight companies](#).

The imposition of lockdowns has once again followed a similar pattern: Citizens are left with no avenues to sustain their precarious livelihoods while governments have offered little to no support to vulnerable populations.

Other than simply imposing lockdowns and restrictions, very few, if any, lessons seem to have been learnt by the authorities as the second wave begins to sweep across the region with relative ease. In Zimbabwe, police even failed to enforce a ban on gatherings including sanctioning a [super-spreader musical event](#) in the congested suburb of Mbare, Harare on New Year's Eve.

The second wave is nothing less than a catastrophe for the region. Inept governments, Covid-19 corruption as well as the lack of a strategy squandered the opportunity created by a relatively forgiving first wave.

As cases and deaths escalate, regional authorities' lack of planning and imagination put the lives of millions more at risk. **DM/MC**

https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-01-10-covid-19-second-wave-ravages-southern-africa/?fbclid=IwAR25QleZqDlzCSEX632IWpw6t_an6y8pSquSLzMYPDNy9JtmCLDT1WhHnJk