

# COVID-19 bi-weekly: An update since our last

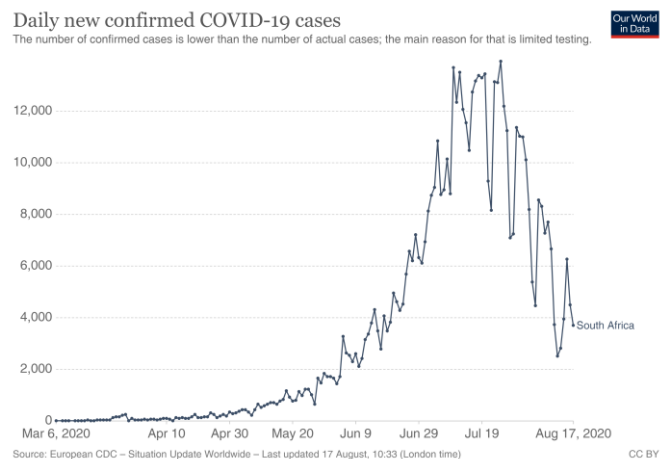
Living in and adapting to a fluid environment seems to be the new normal. This note summarises changes announced by President Ramaphosa on Saturday 15 August and highlights some of the main impacts.

## South Africa transitions to level 2 lockdown

On Saturday, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that lockdown restrictions would be eased further from midnight on 17 August 2020. In his address, the President highlighted that while the cumulative number of cases remains high at 583 653, the number of active cases now stands at 105 000. The recovery rate has crept up to 80%, with a declining trend in new infections, indicating that we may have passed the peak. With less risk of our healthcare services being overwhelmed, and with lockdowns having caused much hardship, President Ramaphosa highlighted the need to kickstart the country’s ailing economy.

### National state of disaster extended, restrictions eased

With COVID-19 still a stark reality, Government still needs exceptional powers to deal with the pandemic. The national state of disaster has therefore been extended until 15 September 2020. The state of disaster allows Government to act to prevent, reduce and mitigate for the severity of disasters. It also limits certain rights of all people within the borders of South Africa, as long as the limitation of these rights are justifiable in terms of the Constitution. In terms of section 27(5) of the Disaster Management Act, a national state of disaster lapses three months after it has been declared and it may continue to be extended for one month at a time before it lapses, or the existing extension expires.



Source: Ourworldindata.org

President Ramaphosa did, however, announce a move to lockdown level 2 from midnight on 17 August 2020. While many restrictions have been eased, all health protocols remain in place to prevent a spike in infections. The wearing of cloth face masks in public remains compulsory, restrictions on gatherings of more than 50 people remain in place, and a curfew still applies between 22h00 and 04h00. Restrictions on interprovincial travel were eased, but restrictions on overseas travel remain in place. Gyms have been allowed to reopen, provided no more than 50 people are present. Social visits are allowed, provided maximum 10 people are present. A new set of regulations and directives applicable to the level 2 lockdown was issued on Monday (read it [here](#)). In the latest [From the desk of the President](#), President Ramaphosa reminds us that the move to level 2 is not a ‘free for all’. The current deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) will last till 30 September, in order to assist law enforcement agencies in enforcing the restrictions still in place under lockdown level 2. However, deployment will drop from 76 000 to around 20 000 members.

### Businesses to continue exercising health and safety measures

The changes are likely to provide welcome relief to businesses across the country, many of whom have seen their profitability deeply impacted by the pandemic. However, restrictions on the number of patrons remain in place for establishments like restaurants, and those who can work from home must continue to be allowed to do so. General health and safety provisions, like wearing a mask in public at all times, continue to apply. The President also highlighted in his speech that the virus is likely to remain with us for many months to come, indicating that we are likely to see a slow and gradual return to normal.

### The sale of alcohol is permitted during set times

The sale of alcohol, for both on- and off-site consumption, is now allowed during certain times. Losses for the wine industry during the lockdown period have been estimated at R7 billion, while the beer industry has seen more than 8 000 licensed taverns and 30% of craft breweries declare bankruptcy since March 2020.

### The sale of cigarettes, tobacco products is permitted

The ban on the sale of cigarettes and tobacco products has now been lifted. While Government did win the initial court battle on the ban, the loss in excise duties for the fiscus amounted to approximately R35 million per day, excluding the damage it brought to the tobacco farmers and industry. While the ban was put in place to protect and improve people’s health during a respiratory pandemic, research indicates that the ban has failed and only resulted in further allowing the illicit trade in tobacco products to blossom.

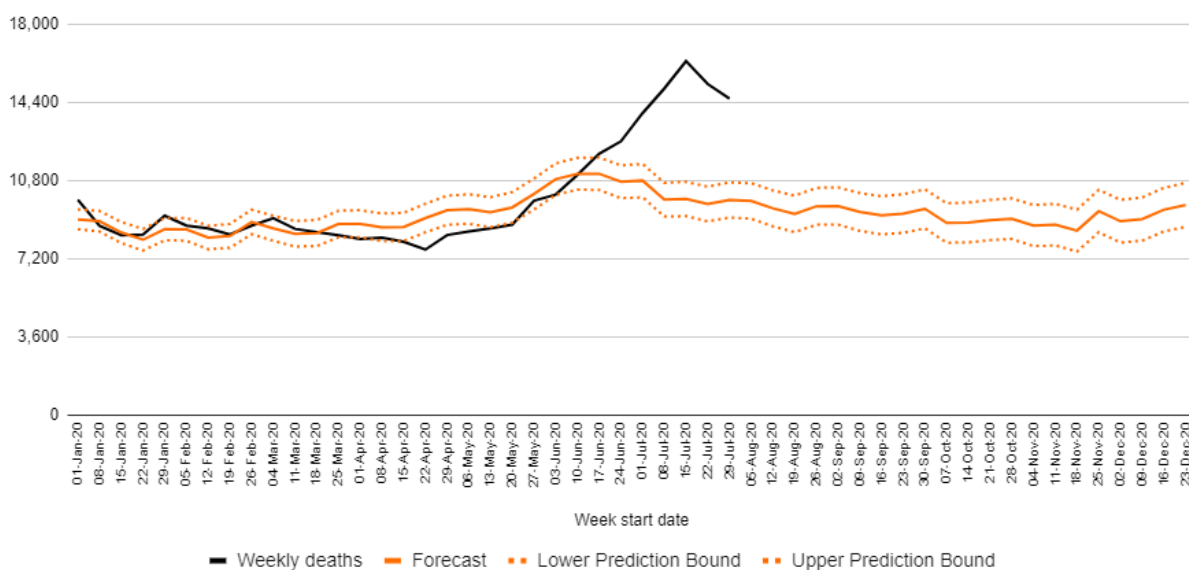
### Government is rolling out digital contact tracing

President Ramaphosa alluded to the fact that Government will announce a new tool to support its digital contact tracing efforts in the coming days. Details are still unclear at this stage.

### There have been numerous opinions on ‘opening the economy’

In his address, President Ramaphosa continued to underscore Government’s resolve in bringing those guilty of corruption to book and strengthening the criminal justice system. He highlighted that discussions with NEDLAC around the economic recovery programme have the protection and creation of employment as a core objective. He again highlighted the opportunity the pandemic presents to reshape the South Africa economy to be more inclusive and fair.

South Africa Weekly Deaths from All Causes 1+ years : 1 Jan - 4 August 2020



Source: [South African Medical Research Council](#). The forecast numbers are the weekly deaths that would have been expected based on historical data from 2018 and 2019.

While the excess deaths (the number of deaths in excess of historic figures) are currently three times higher than the official COVID-19 death rate, the question still remains whether the focus should be on protecting lives or livelihoods. The decision is complicated if one considers that livelihoods aren’t only limited to the loss of more than 3 000 000 jobs, but also that the resultant abject poverty will lead to a loss in lives as well. Research done by the large insurers shows that a drop of 10% in GDP could result in 30 000 lives lost due to malnutrition and increased health risks. Balancing the response to the pandemic and economic growth will continue to remain a fluid situation. While we continue to battle the scourge of corruption during this time, South Africans have nevertheless proved that they are at their best in times of uncertainty and adversity.