

HOW SA WILL EXIT LOCK DOWN

■ *Restrictions will be phased out*

■ *Precautionary measures will remain*

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SOUTH Africa is into its second period of lockdown – a further two weeks added to the initial three by President Cyril Ramaphosa – and thoughts are turning to the exit strategy in May.

This involves a careful balance between managing the health crisis still expected to peak in the winter months ahead, and potentially catastrophic personal and national consequences of an extended economic shut-down.

During a regular ministerial briefing on Thursday, Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, gave some indication of what to expect after April 30.

“When we do stop the lockdown, we can’t do it abruptly. We have to phase it in so that there’s an orderly move towards what would be normality,” said Dlamini Zuma.

She stressed that precautionary measures would remain beyond April 30 to safeguard the health of the nation. “It doesn’t mean that after the lockdown, everything will go back to normal.”

Some partial easing was announced this week, including extending the list of essential services to allow plumbers, electricians and mechanics to purchase certain parts and perform certain essential repair jobs.

It can be expected that more services would slowly be allowed to resume, and that some restrictions on personal movement, such as allowing simple exercise or take-away food deliveries, may come, although the ban on air and sea travel and large gatherings would remain for the foreseeable future.

With no indication yet when schools and universities may reopen, provision has been made to make material available online so students do not fall behind with their studies. Debates continue as to the best way to mitigate lost school days, including culling the curriculum, extending school hours and shortening holidays.

Another indication of what to expect came from active support for wearing a face mask from a number of ministers and Gauteng Premier David Makhura, and it may become mandatory to wear a mask and maintain physical distance in public even after lockdown.

Meanwhile, epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim, chairperson of Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize’s advisory team, this week outlined eight stages in the campaign against Covid-19.

These stages, some of which run concurrently, began with preparation, primary prevention and lockdown and moved on to identifying hot spots, medical care during the peak, the aftermath and ongoing vigilance.

Karim said in a discussion on SABC yesterday that the combination of the State of Disaster, including closing borders to travel, and the lockdown had a marked impact on the fight against Covid-19 and bought South Africa vital time to prepare to deal with the peak of the outbreak, which is still to come.

In trying to devise a post-lockdown strategy, he said one must look at all of the steps, which were not sequential but could overlap. Potentially, he said, there would be a rise in cases after lockdown, so the strategy was to identify hot spots of infection.

He spoke of the importance of the Covid-19 information centre at the CSIR, a data centre that monitors and tracks Covid-19 in the country, with dashboards and real-time analytics vital to guiding decisions of the National Coronavirus Command Council.

“We will tackle this problem using data to make smart decisions,” he said, explaining that the team called in academics and researchers from a wide range of fields to provide scientific advice.

Recent steps include community testing, identifying quarantine sites, increasing hospital beds, distribution of personal protective equipment and plans to build ventilators.