

The big question – What happens after the lockdown?

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South Africa has been congratulated for acting quickly and decisively to contain the spread of the coronavirus using stringent lockdown rules.

A growing number of people are now questioning the government's strategy around the prolonged lockdown, however, considering the predicted loss of jobs and business closures.

There are many strategies to address the coronavirus pandemic, which range from strict lockdowns, like the one in South Africa, to only limited interventions like those implemented in Sweden.

These measures are typically linked to the outcome which a country is aiming for, which can be divided into two categories:

- **Flatten the curve** – The aim is to control the spread of the virus to avoid or delay the peak to ensure the healthcare system can cope with demand.
- **Eradication** – Using a strict lockdown to completely stop community transmission of the coronavirus, effectively eliminating the virus.

Eradication is challenging in countries like South Africa where the virus continues to show strong growth – see the chart [from Media Hack](#) below.

Flattening the curve is therefore the preferred option.

What is not widely communicated, in South Africa at least, is that a large percentage of a population must get the coronavirus in the “flatten the curve” strategy.

University of Melbourne epidemiologist [Professor Tony Blakely explained](#) herd immunity is needed to ensure a second wave of the outbreak is prevented.

“What they’re not saying is that ‘flatten the curve’ likely means that by the time this is over, 60% of us will have been infected, to develop herd immunity,” he said.

Blakely argues that herd immunity is needed to protect society once physical distancing and shutdown restrictions are lifted, and when borders are reopened.

This is partly because a vaccine against COVID-19 is estimated to be between 12-18 months away.

What happens when the lockdown is over?

Professor Johan Giesecke, a senior epidemiologist and World Health Organisation advisor, is a critic of strict lockdowns.

He said countries which implement a strict lockdown, either to flatten the curve or eradicate the disease, are painting themselves into a corner.

"I don't think any government which I know of gave a minute's thought on how to end the lockdowns," he said.

He said there is very little chance of stopping the coronavirus outbreak through any measures. This means when a lockdown is ended, the growth in coronavirus cases and deaths will return.

This view is [shared by Professor Salim Karim](#), who chairs South Africa's COVID-19 advisory committee.

He said the lockdown has given South Africa time to flatten the curve and to prepare for the inevitable growth in cases.

However, the exponential growth seen in other countries is highly likely to appear when the lockdown is lifted.

Giesecke questioned what countries which managed to slow the spread of the virus or even eradicate it through strict lockdowns planned to do in the future.

To keep the virus at bay, they will have to maintain strict lockdown measures, which include closing their borders or implementing strict quarantine rules for travellers.

This is not economically sustainable and leaves these countries with difficult decisions to make, unless a vaccine or cure is found quickly.

South Africa's lockdown challenge

The situation described by Giesecke is the one which South Africa finds itself in, and economists are starting to raise the alarm.

South Africa's National Treasury has warned that South Africa is facing widespread job losses, tax losses, and a contracting economy.

National Treasury's director-general Dondo Mogajane said the country's economy could contract by as much as 16.1% this year. This will result in up to 7 million job losses.

Mogajane said South Africa has to move quickly to get the economy back to normal while containing the impact of the virus.

His concern is [shared by Sygnia CEO Magda Wierzycka](#), who said South Africa's economy is already over the brink and the country is now facing a humanitarian crisis.

She said thousands of people are already queuing for 15 hours to get food parcels – something which has never happened in South Africa before.

"More people are going to die in this country from hunger, desperation, violence, and social unrest," she said.

She said vulnerable people should be isolated to protect them from the coronavirus, but that others should be allowed to go back to work to make a living.

Former FNB CEO and venture capitalist Michael Jordaan said South Africa is "ineffective at stopping the spread of the virus, but effective at killing the economy".

"We need be smarter about the lockdown and smarter about saving jobs," said Jordaan.