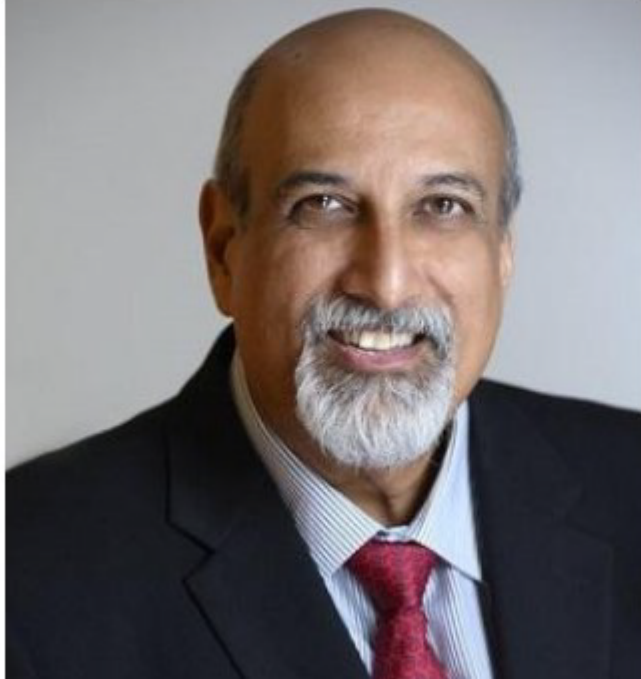


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Author: Alan Hammond



South Africa's expert on Covid-19, Professor Salim Abdool Karim has shared his thoughts on what stage we are in with the outbreak and what we can expect in the months ahead. He also has some advice for the country - we need to manage the risk and get and do as much as we can. "We have the next two to three months in which we've got to get back into our lives, back into our jobs, we've got to get back to school. We've got to live with this virus, we've got to do everything we can," advises Abdool Karim.

In the last two months all our lives have been turned upside down by the arrival of a new virus that never existed before - meaning no one has any immunity to it.

South Africa's response to the international pandemic of Covid-19 has been assisted by world renowned expert in infectious diseases, Professor Abdool Karim who chairs the advisory committee for the national Minister of Health.

It was Professor Abdool Karim who first explained to the South Africans that we have to accept the danger this virus has for us, and also that our country does not have any special 'mojo' that makes us different to every other country in the world that is also dealing with Covid-19.

On Thursday 30th April the Professor addressed an online conference organised by the Bhekisisa online publication. Nearly two months since the first case arrived in South Africa he explained what we can expect in the months ahead.

"We can expect that the cases will begin to rise and that we will start to see many more outbreaks. We are going to see flames everywhere. It is just how this virus continues to spread," the Professor explained.

"The key thing is not to get worked up about it," adds the Professor. " You know what to expect, you know it is coming, and when you see it you put in place our factors of mitigation. It doesn't help to get worked up about it because it is going to happen." Whether we like it or not. No matter what we do".

"We are going to see many more outbreaks. We are going to see outbreaks in schools, shopping malls, workplaces. It is going to happen."

"Our hospitals are going to be the most vulnerable areas for outbreaks because sick patients with Covid go to hospital. When they get to a hospital even when all the precautions are taken we have to accept that there will be transmission".

"This is going to be our scenario. We are going to see a slow and steady increase in cases - which we must see. At some point there will be an inflection where we will see a very rapid rise in the number of cases".

When that happens we have to expect that there will be action taken to flatten the curve again.

"Every time the curve goes up we are going to try to flatten to again".

"We cannot stop this virus from spreading. We have to find a way to live with this virus. We have to find a way in which we accept that this virus poses a threat to us but that we will continue our everyday lives. Accepting that this threat exists but doing whatever we can to minimise that threat".

"That's how we need to think about our lives going forward," concludes Professor Abdol Karim.

He explains that we are likely to see the rise in cases somewhere around July. It could be late August/September, that sort of ballpark.

"That means we have the next two to three months in which we've got to get back into our lives, back into our jobs, we've got to get back to school. We've got to live with this virus, we've got to do everything we can".

"I get concerned that people will start panicking when they see outbreaks. They will try to blame people. They will try to stigmatise those who got infected. It's Nothing of the sort, no one is to blame, it's just the virus that continues to spread in this way. There will be outbreaks. In schools, in shopping malls."

"If we over react then I think we are going to find ourselves continually on the back foot. Instead we have to find a way in which when we find a problem we send in the teams and they try to do their best to douse it and keep it under control so it doesn't become a raging fire".

"Flatten the curve, deal with the flames. That approach seems to have worked very well in several countries and that is what we are following," concluded Abdool Karim.