



Monday, 11 May 2020

Dear Fellow South Africans,

Since the beginning of May, when we began the gradual easing of the nation-wide coronavirus lockdown, many people have started returning to work.

As part of the phased recovery of the economy, companies in certain specified industries have been able to resume part or all of their operations.

The national coronavirus alert level is now at 4, which means that extreme precautions remain in place to limit community transmission. Our goal is to steadily reduce the alert level by keeping the rate of infection down and getting our health system ready for the inevitable increase in cases.

As the lockdown is gradually eased, life will slowly return. But it will not be life as we knew it before.

While there is still much about the pandemic that is unknown, experts now agree that the virus will remain a threat to global public health for some time.

We must therefore be prepared to continue to live with the coronavirus among us for a year or even more.

We must be prepared for a new reality in which the fight against COVID-19 becomes part of our daily existence.

Our success in overcoming the coronavirus will ultimately be determined by the changes we make in our behaviour.

Even after lockdown – especially after lockdown – we will still need to observe social distancing, wear face masks, wash hands regularly, and avoid contact with other people. We will need to re-organise workplaces, schools, universities, colleges and other public places to limit transmission.

We will need to adapt to new ways of worshipping, socialising, exercising and meeting that minimise opportunities for the virus to spread.

This is a reality that countries across the world are having to confront. Even those countries that have started easing their lockdown restrictions are doing so tentatively and with extreme caution.

Like we have done, many countries are implementing extensive stimulus packages to strengthen their respective health care sectors, support ailing industries and workers and provide relief to vulnerable households.

Like us, they have had to heed calls for economic activity to resume. Like our citizens, their populations are restive and frustrated with the curtailment of personal freedoms.

At the same time, health experts around the globe are warning of a 'second wave' of infections as public life resumes. A number of countries including Germany, Iran and China have seen a rise in new infections since they relaxed certain restrictions.

We will be no different. We can and must expect infections to rise as more people return to work. We must accept the reality, prepare for it and adapt to it.

The next phase of our national response is as much about continuity as it is about change or innovation. We will step up our intensive screening, testing and case management programme. We will introduce new measures to make contact tracing more effective. We will need to implement mass sanitisation of workplaces, public transport and other spaces.

Since the nationwide lockdown began, most South Africans have observed the regulations that are in place for their own health and safety. They have made an informed decision to do so, understanding it is necessary for their own lives and for the lives of those around them.

As the restrictions on economic activity and daily life are eased, it is vital that all South Africans maintain that firm sense of personal responsibility. In all that we do, in every sphere of life, we must take care of our own health and the health of others.

Whether as individuals, employers, employees, government, civil society, trade unions or businesses, we will all continue to have a role to play in fighting the pandemic.

In the same way that we had to change our behaviour to prevent the spread of HIV, now we need to change our behaviour to stop the coronavirus.

Imposing a nation-wide lockdown gave our country a strategic advantage. It bought us valuable time to prepare our health system and put in place containment measures. This has slowed transmission and saved lives.

The transition to the next phase of the coronavirus response, that of recovery, will be more difficult than the present one. The risk of infection outbreaks will increase. The demands on our clinics and hospitals and medical personnel will grow.

That is why easing the lockdown restrictions must not result in careless behaviour by individuals or reckless practices by businesses keen to resume activity at the cost of human health.

The coronavirus crisis will pass. But for as long as it remains a threat to the lives of our people, we must remain vigilant, diligent and responsible.

Now, more than ever, it is upon the conduct of each that depends the fate of all.

With best wishes,

Ajit Ramakrishna