

GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI



PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT

PARTIAL LOCKDOWN STRENGTHENED MEASURES

Following the pronouncement of a relaxed partial lockdown last week to balance the scales between protecting the lives of Emaswati and ensuring access to the basic necessities of life, in the wake of the devastating effects of COVID 19, new information has emerged showing that positive cases have almost doubled from 16 to 31.

Currently, a total of 1 051 COVID 19 tests have been conducted in the Kingdom, with 31 testing positive of which 20 are on treatment, 10 recovered and one death. More than 62 000 people have been screened for COVID 19 countrywide.

Over the week of the extended partial lockdown, we have observed with concern that complacency among the populace is creeping in and an increasing number of people around the country are now casual and lack vigilance in preventing the transmission of the virus. The level of compliance to the measures which are aimed at curtailing the rapid spread of COVID 19 has dramatically dropped.

The number of people leaving their homes and places of residence for non essential services has spiked up, potentially exposing themselves and others to COVID 19. It has almost become business as usual in our cities, towns and communities yet the partial lockdown measures are still in force.

Our health system cannot withstand an upsurge of infections in this Kingdom and neither are our resources adequate to manage an uncontrollable transmission of the virus.

It is for these reasons that, after wide consultations, Government has taken the decision to remove the relaxed measures of the partial lockdown with effect from Friday 24 April 2020. Therefore the following will apply.

1. In line with the COVID 19 Regulations, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade will issue revised guidelines regarding certain business operations.
2. Guidelines of the relaxed operation of public transport are removed. A new set of transport guidelines will be announced by the Minister of Public Works and Transport.
3. All the measures effected at the start of the partial lockdown on March 27 continue to be in full force. These include that:
 - Non essential travel between communities, towns, cities and regions is strictly prohibited for all citizens.
 - All public and private gatherings exceeding 20 or more people are prohibited.
 - Citizens and residents returning home from abroad will be quarantined for 14 days
 - Visitation to hospitals is restricted
 - Workers in non essential services should work from home.

Our security forces will be vigilant in enforcing compliance to these preventative measures to help the country buy more time to strengthen our response and capacity to flatten the curve.

Government has taken lessons from the experiences of other countries across the world over this unprecedented time in our history.

We are all learning on the go and as a result, now and again, Government will review these measures to adjust to the situation on the ground at any particular time. We are aware of the negative effects of COVID 19 hence we will adapt and respond effectively to preserve the lives of Eswatini.

We all have to take full responsibility of our lives and that of our families, communities and country. I appeal to parents to lead by example and stay at home. No child, and certainly no adult, should roam out of the precinct of their home for any reason beyond seeking food or medical attention.

While necessary, the partial lockdown has come with dire consequences for our economy and, more particularly, for the most vulnerable of our society. For some Eswatini who were already struggling to have a frequent supply of food, this calamity has exacerbated their daily struggles for adequate meals.

Over the next two weeks, Government will implement the following interventions:

1. Provide food assistance to the most vulnerable of our society that have been adversely affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. The food assistance will benefit over 300 000 individuals from 63 000 households across all four regions of the Kingdom.

2. Government will ensure availability of face masks to minimize the spread of the virus.
3. We will increase the number of ventilators available in the Kingdom to assist COVID 19 positive cases.
4. Over a thousand scanners will be made available to help upscale the screening process.
5. Government will intensify screening and testing for COVID 19 symptoms.
6. Intensify contact tracing as an important element of identifying potential cases in order to curb the spread of the virus.
7. Increase provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health workers. We are cognizant of the shortage of PPEs due to limited international supply. Government is intensifying the processes of sourcing PPEs and has encouraged local suppliers to produce some of this equipment.

The water sanitation and hygiene sector is also supporting interventions to rehabilitate non functional water points and expand reticulated schemes. While we recognise the emergency, the approach is sensitive to sustainable approaches to ensure that the benefits last beyond the emergency and the COVID-19 response.

Government remains firm and committed to addressing the health and economic challenges of COVID 19 to protect the lives and livelihoods of Eswatini. The following steps are underway:

- Government is working on an economic response plan post COVID 19.
- Government is in the process of getting loans from various international banks towards COVID 19.
- The electronic payment of the elderly grant is progressing well.
- The Central Bank has reduced the repo rate by 100 basis points. This reduction allows businesses to get loans at lower

interest rates and leaves more money in the pockets of consumers.

- We are working on increasing the number of ICU beds for a possible increase in the number of people requiring admission.

Government is determined to pursue relevant and practical avenues to dampen the economic and social impact of the partial lockdown in the midst of the pandemic.

The Ministry of Health continues to study the spread and effects of the novel virus across the country. We now know from recent studies that a significant portion of individuals with COVID 19 lack symptoms and that even those who eventually develop symptoms can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms.

This means that the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity - for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing - even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms.

In light of this new evidence, Government recommends wearing masks or cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. It is of critical importance to emphasize that maintaining social distancing remains important to slowing the spread of the virus.

The Ministry of Health is additionally advising the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others.

Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure.

The cloth face coverings or masks recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders

My gratitude goes to our frontline staff – the health workers who are leading the charge in the fight against this virus. We acknowledge the dedication and commitment for which they have taken this task in their stride under trying and demanding circumstances.

May I, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, pass our sincere gratitude and appreciation for their devotion to a noble cause. Our appreciation is also extended to all workers in essential services who continue to risk their lives to keep our economy and livelihoods safe and enduring.

I can never over emphasize the importance of maintaining good hygiene to fight this virus. By following the precautionary guidelines as provided by the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation we will win this war. These include:

- Washing hands regularly with running water and soap and using a sanitizer in the absence of water.
- Stop shaking hands and use other non touch methods of greeting.
- Maintain a distance of at least 1 metre from each other at all times.
- Avoid touching your face (mouth, nose, eyes) and cover coughs and sneezes.
- All high touch surfaces in our home and business environment must be disinfected regularly.
- Keep your distance from people showing flu like symptoms (fever, difficulty breathing, cough, high temperature)

- If you experience flu like symptoms visit your nearest health centre facility or call the Emergency Medical Services Toll free line 977.
- The public can also call the Emergency toll free line 112 for COVID 19 related emergency inquiries and for reporting incidences related to the response and interventions of the virus.

Let us all take full personal responsibility for saving lives by staying at home and following all the prevention measures.

Medical experts have given us a scenario that shows that we are on a precarious trajectory if we do not make the essential adjustments. Our action now as individuals and as a collective will determine our future as a country in the battle against this dreaded virus.

On behalf of His Majesty's Government, I take this moment to thank Their Majesties for their wise counsel and guidance which is seeing us through this difficult time.

Thank you.

Ambrose Mandvulo Dlamini
PRIME MINISTER

22 April 2020