SOUTH Africans will know by the end of this week if the country’s fight against the spread of coronavirus in communities is succeeding or not. This was the sentiment shared by epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim. The chief adviser to the government on the virus described this week as being the most critical since the outbreak. He sounded the warning during a briefing with policymakers, health officials, and medical experts on Monday.

"We have reached a critical juncture. We need to know what the community transmission levels are; because we want to know that we are on the next steps to follow and how we should manage the lockdown," he said.

If we fail to find out whether we can know if the community transmission, and whether our interpretation of that community transmission, has been kept low," he said. He said if countries bailed the country for successfully delaying the spread of coronavirus, he warned that it would not matter what we say is economic. According to him, the worst was still to come.

"Can South Africa escape the worst of this epidemic? Is the exponential spread over? One answer, however, is that it is very unlikely. Put simply, no, we can’t escape this epidemic... Our population is too large to be effective. If we don’t have any protective immunity against this virus, he said.

He said Karim said lifting the lockdown could lead to the resurgence of new infections.

"At the end of the lockdown, the epidemic was 'likely to come back.' He added: 'And I hope we hope for is that the lockdown of Abdo Karim said that new cases are on a steady decline and they are currently not that is the end of the story. I am sorry to tell you that is most unlikely. What we need to do is to stem community transmission through the lockdown,' he said.

He noted that the virus trajectory in the country was unique when compared with much of the world. He added that new cases we virtually have in South Africa was the same as the number of cases we saw in the UK.

Unlike the UK, which saw a rapid upward trajectory in community cases when it reached 100, "we didn’t experience a straight upward exponential curve".

"What you are about the trends here is that we were on an upward trajectory. We were entering the exponential curve whereby a number of cases were increasing rapidly.

On what he took a turn instead of continuing straight up an exponential curve, he said: "March 26 is important because that was a day after lockdown. We reached a stage where we saw a number of cases already we see a similar number of cases every day," he said. He added that the country was able to implement four stages, which included preparations, a lockdown and surveillance programmes and active case finding, Karim said. He added that the country would have a vaccination programme which would include ensuring that all of us follow the lockdown rules andmonitor community transmission.

He also warned that "if we end the lockdown, we will be facing the risk of undoing the work we have achieved because then we will be putting high-risk people together".

"This has been a very good opportunity."