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Africa sets Covid-19 example despite infrastructure problems

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AFRICA'S overburdened public health systems, dearth of testing facilities and overcrowded suburbs had experts predicting a disaster when Covid-19 hit the continent in February.

The new coronavirus was already wreaking havoc in Asian and European nations, and a UN agency said in April that, even with social distancing measures, the virus could kill 300 000 Africans this year.

In May the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that 190 000 people on the continent could die if containment measures failed.

Yet as the world marks 1 million Covid-19 deaths, Africa is doing much better than expected, with a lower percentage of deaths than other continents.

The continent's case fatality count stands at 2.4%, with roughly 35 000 deaths among the more than 1.4 million people reported infected with Covid-19, according to Reuters data as of Monday.

In North America, it is 2.9% and in Europe 4.5%.

Hard-hit countries such as Italy and Britain have recorded fatality counts of 11.6% and 9.0% respectively, compared with 1.6% for Ethiopia, 1.9%



DR CELESTE Jonker worked as the medical activities manager at the Khayelitsha Field Hospital. | AYANDA NDAMANE African News Agency (ANA)

for Nigeria and 2.4% for South Africa, the continent's worst affected country.

"Based on what we have seen so far it is unlikely that we are going to see anything at the scale that we are seeing in Europe – both in terms of infections and mortality," said Rashida Ferrand, a London School of Hygiene and Tropi-

cal Medicine professor working at the Parirenyatwa Group of Hospitals in the Zimbabwean capital Harare.

Scientists and public health experts have cited a number of possible factors, including the continent's youthful population and lessons learned from previous disease outbreaks.



SEVERAL Thusong Centres in the province were also used as field hospitals to take care of Covid-19 patients. | PHANDO JIKELO African News Agency (ANA)

"There is a lot of circumstantial evidence," said Professor Salim Abdool Karim, a South African infectious disease specialist who has advised the government on Covid-19, "but there is no smoking gun."

South Africa introduced one of the world's toughest lockdowns in late

March, when the country had confirmed just 400 cases.

"Africa brought down the hammer earlier in terms of coronavirus lockdowns," said Tim Bromfield, regional director for East and southern Africa at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, a UK-based think tank.