

'Lifting lockdown could be disaster'

By **SIMON NARE**

IN TERMS of the lockdown, this week is the most crucial yet.

If there's an average of more than 90 new cases per day this week, the lockdown would have to continue beyond the expected time frame.

In a presentation on Monday night, the Department of Health showed the nation its plan to fight the pandemic.

Last week, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the lockdown would continue until end of April and not this Friday as originally planned.

But department advisor Professor Abdool Karim, an epidemiologist, said rushing to lift it could be disastrous later as more people would be vulnerable to the virus.

"Can South Africa escape the worst of this epidemic? The answer sadly is that it's very unlikely.

"Our population is at high risk because none of us have immunity against this virus. So as soon as we end the lockdown we will have that high risk."

Karim said an infected person could go for two to three days without being infectious, but after that would be in a position to infect others. He said it could stay in the system for two weeks without showing any symptoms.

"So that person would be infecting people without knowing they have the virus."

He said they had seen that each person in Mzansi can infect two or three others. A fast return to normality may increase the spread.

"The plan is to ease the lockdown over several days," he said.

He said the lockdown had restricted the movement of people and stopped those arriving from other countries with the virus.

"By 18 April we will know if our interventions are working.

"If the number is more than 90 per day we will extend the lockdown, if it's between 45 and 89 we'll continue the lockdown. If less than 44, we'll ease the lockdown," he said.

During the lockdown, the country still has to embark on other phases that have been put in place to fight the spread such as identifying hot spots and mass testing.