

# The Herald

## Editorial Comment

# Lockdown, in some form, here to stay

**A**s SA settles into its third week under lockdown, questions are being asked about whether the government should extend the Covid-19 quarantine measure yet again. President Cyril Ramaphosa announced on Thursday that the initial 21-day lockdown, which had been scheduled to end this week, would be extended until the end of April because “we risk a massive and uncontrollable resurgence of the disease” by ending it too abruptly.

Then, on Monday night, Prof Salim Abdool Karim, chair of health minister Dr Zweli Mkhize’s 45-member advisory committee on Covid-19, warned that once the lockdown was ended — “and we are going to have to end it at some point” — then new cases were likely to emerge.

He said the virus was only expected to peak in SA in September.

“As soon as the opportunity arises for this virus to spread, we are likely to see the exponential curve again,” Karim, also the co-director of the Centre for Aids Research in Africa at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, warned.

“Can SA escape the worst of this epidemic? Is the exponential spread avoidable? The answer is that it is very, very unlikely. Put simply: no, we cannot escape this epidemic.

“We cannot escape, not unless SA has a special protective factor not present anywhere else in the world.

“Our population will be at high risk again after the lockdown because all of us are vulnerable.”

SA’s Covid-19 trajectory is unusual because, unlike most other countries, it did not see an exponential increase in infections after its first 100 cases.

Even so, in the absence of a vaccine, it could take months, if not years, to overcome the virus. So, the next few days will be crucial in determining SA’s next step.

If there were more than 90 new cases confirmed on average per day, the country would “need to continue the lockdown”, Karim warned, recommending even a “voluntary partial lockdown until end September” for people older than 60 and those with underlying conditions.

Perhaps the country should explore various ways to keep some of the lockdown regulations in place because no economy will be able to function properly when the infection rate continues to climb.

Every measure possible must be taken to ensure the safety of all citizens.