

South Africa cautiously ends one of the world's strictest lockdowns.

South Africa said it would lift a nationwide lockdown on Friday, but continue to implement strict social distancing and face mask rules, as the nation, already under siege from H.I.V., prepares for a new threat from the seasonal flu. Even with the eased restrictions, masks and social distancing will be mandatory and an overnight curfew will be implemented. Employees must still work from home, and gyms and restaurants will remain closed. Schools will not reopen until June 1.

The country quickly sprung into action in March over fears that its population, heavily affected by H.I.V. and AIDS, would be particularly susceptible to the new coronavirus.

Beginning on Friday, miners will return to work underground — a move crucial to the economy — in an industry already overwhelmed by high rates of H.I.V. and tuberculosis infection. More than 13 percent of the South African population is H.I.V. positive, meaning nearly eight million people have compromised immune systems.

With 5,350 confirmed coronavirus cases and just over 100 deaths, officials say the phased reopening is essential to curbing the pandemic in a country with a vulnerable population and poor health system.

The economic toll of fighting Covid-19 also necessitated a \$26.16 billion stimulus plan, with money borrowed from the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank and others.

An unfamiliar sight since the end of apartheid, tanks carrying soldiers rolled into neighborhoods to assist police with enforcing the lockdown. As in other nations, officers were accused of heavy handedness, with six people killed by police in the first week, many in communities of color. This is also where testing and screening drives, led by volunteers wearing protective gear, have been focused.

"Community transmission is there, we see cases, but it's not spreading like that wildfire that we had expected and that's what's leading to this funny turn in the epidemic and the shape of our curve," said Professor Salim Abdool Karim, head of the country's Covid-19 task force, presenting a plateaued infection rate.