

Southern Africa Tourism Services Association NPC

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SOUTH AFRICA'S ADDITION TO CDC'S LEVEL 4 VERY-HIGH ASSESSMENT NOT REFLECTIVE OF THE DATA AND CIRCUMSTANCES ON THE GROUND – SAYS SATSA

SATSA notes with concern the decision by the US-based Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to categorise South Africa on Level 4: COVID-19 Very-High [Risk Assessment Level](#). The CDC uses Travel Health Notices (THN) to alert travellers and other audiences to health threats around the world and advises on how to protect themselves.

In November 2020, the CDC adapted its three-level notice system to a four-level system for COVID, categorising destinations into four levels, the highest being Level 4 destinations, against which it advocates ALL TRAVEL.

According to the CDC, the THN thresholds are based on the number of COVID-19 cases in a destination, the [primary criteria](#) for destinations with populations over 200,000 being:

1. Incidence rate (cumulative new cases over the past 28 days per 100,000 population)
2. New case trajectory (have daily new cases increased, decreased, or remained stable over the past 28 days)

Based on this CDC's stipulated criteria, South Africa should in fact not be categorised as a Level 4 risk. Rather, based on the recorded data below, South Africa should be on Level 3.

South Africa's daily infection rate has averaged around the 1,200 mark in terms of number of tests conducted per 100k population over 28 days (CDC wants this to be above 1200, even for countries with a low prevalence of COVID-19 like South Africa).

The number of new cases over 28 days in South Africa has been hovering around 50 cases per 100k population which is near the cut-off point (51 cases per 100k population is the CDC's cut-off point to be bumped into a higher risk category).

COVID Statistics South Africa				(official stats from sacoronavirus.co.za)							
Date	Daily Tests Done	28 Day Total Tests Done	28 Day Average Tests per 100k	Daily New Cases	28 Day Total New Cases	28 Day Average Cases per 100k	28 Day Average Test to Case Ratio	Current Active Cases	Active Cases % of population	Active Cases Per 100k pop	
22-Apr-21	34493	724852	1208.09	1413	29786	49.64	24.34	20597	0.034	34.33	
23-Apr-21	33903	729515	1215.86	1637	29907	49.85	24.39	19809	0.033	33.02	
24-Apr-21	26934	728896	1214.83	1385	29905	49.84	24.37	19885	0.033	33.14	
25-Apr-21	22469	727109	1211.85	1101	30041	50.07	24.20	20138	0.034	33.56	
26-Apr-21	14838	725824	1209.71	849	30342	50.57	23.92	20254	0.034	33.76	
27-Apr-21	21776	722758	1204.60	880	30466	50.78	23.72	19977	0.033	33.30	
28-Apr-21	22514	710759	1184.60	1250	30294	50.49	23.46	20554	0.034	34.26	
29-Apr-21	23137	701171	1168.62	1086	30086	50.14	23.31	20779	0.035	34.63	
30-Apr-21	29840	703389	1172.32	1674	30487	50.81	23.07	21240	0.035	35.40	
01-May-21	27957	714955	1191.59	1632	31342	52.24	22.81	21704	0.036	36.17	
02-May-21	16194	719032	1198.39	1222	32101	53.50	22.40	21869	0.036	36.45	
03-May-21	16752	724693	1207.82	897	32546	54.24	22.27	21986	0.037	36.64	

(Source: <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/> - table compiled by Onne Vegter)

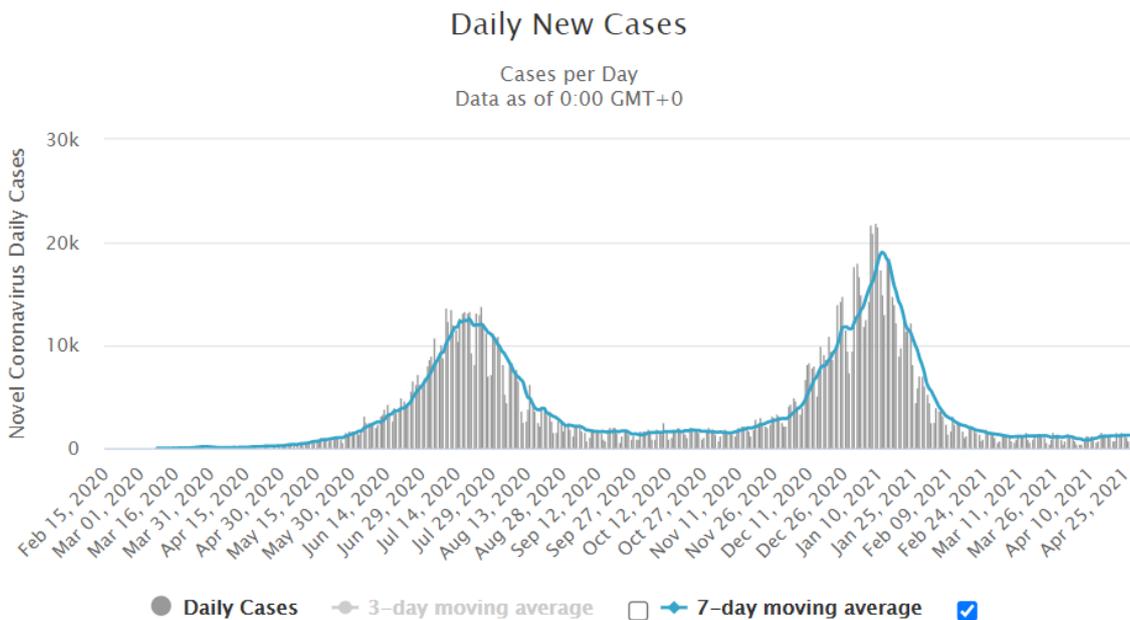
The test to case ratio is around 23 (the CDC wants this to be above 30, even for countries with a low prevalence of COVID-19 like South Africa).

Pandemic Profile of South Africa

South Africa has seen two distinct waves of infection: the first peaked in July 2020, and the second in January 2021. Predictions of a third wave following Easter (2-5 April) have so far not materialised.

New Daily Cases:

Since mid-March 2021, average new daily cases have remained stable at around 1,200 per day. Current 7-day rolling average is at 1,175 new cases per day, or 19.6 per million population:



(Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/south-africa/>)

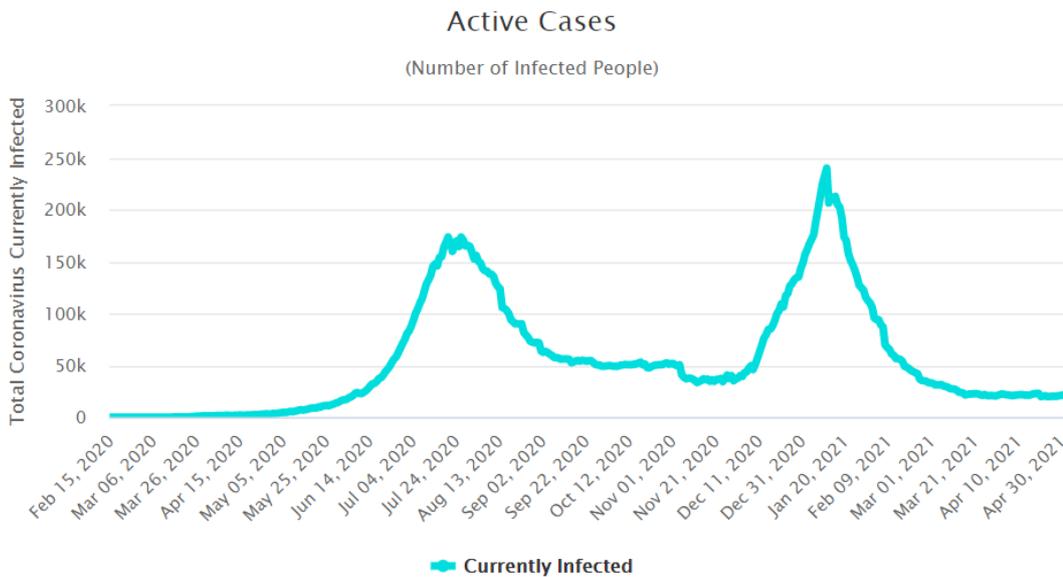
Comparison to key source markets:

It is clear that South Africa’s 7-day average of new daily cases is much lower than that of key source markets that have banned travel to and from South Africa.

- SA: Current 7 day rolling average is 1,175 new cases per day or 20 per million (30 April 2021)
- UK: Current 7 day rolling average is 2,216 new cases per day or 33 per million (30 April 2021)
- US: Current 7 day rolling average is 53,653 new cases per day or 161 per million (30 April 2021)
- Germany: Current 7 day rolling average is 18,638 new cases per day or 221 per million (30 April 2021)

Active Cases:

Active cases in South Africa have remained stable at around 21,000 since late March 2021. This is about 0.035% of the population, or 346 per million population:



(Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/south-africa/>)

Comparison to key source markets:

- SA: Currently 21,240 active cases or 354 per million (30 April 2021)
- UK: Currently 74,315 active cases or 1,092 per million (30 April 2021)
- US: Currently 6,803,777 active cases or 20,456 per million (30 April 2021)
- Germany: Currently 313,490 active cases or 3,732 per million (30 April 2021)

Traveller Confidence

South Africa, which had one of the world's earliest and strictest lockdowns, is marking a significant shift in its fight against COVID. As a country that has long battled against diseases like HIV and tuberculosis, the latter being particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, South Africa already has robust systems in place to deal with COVID.

Throughout the pandemic, South Africa's response has been led by world-class scientists and epidemiologists, and praised by the WHO as a model for other countries to follow. WHO Health Emergencies Program Executive Director Michael Ryan referred to South Africa's COVID-19 response as being "incredible" and among the best in the world.

Health and hygiene Protocols

South Africa has instituted strict health and hygiene protocols, both legislated and driven by industry through the Tourism Business Council of South Africa's Travel Safe Eat Safe programme. Hospitality providers, including accommodation providers, restaurants, etc., are subject to these protocols, which include retaining contact details of patrons and guests, including their temperature, for tracking and tracing; mandatory requirement of wearing masks, sanitising surfaces, sanitising stations, reducing touch points, capacity restrictions, curfews from midnight to 4am. With these protocols in place, it is business as usual for the hospitality and aviation sector.

PCR Testing

PCR testing is widely available in South Africa. Private laboratories, such as Ampath and Lancet offer PCR testing with or without appointment. There is also PCR testing at OR Tambo International, Cape Town International and King Shaka International. For travellers wanting concierge PCR testing, there are several private medical providers who provide testing facilities at any accommodation, even lodges in the Kruger. The cost of PCR tests is around R850 and these take between 24 and 48 hours for results. Rapid antigen and antibody testing are also widely available.

Vaccine Programme

South Africa's vaccination programme has been highly criticised for being too slow and not meeting the deadlines that were initially set. Challenges that have arisen include the decision not to use Astra Zeneca in South Africa, despite having procured the vaccines because of its reported effectiveness on the variant predominantly found in South Africa - 501Y.V2, as well as the temporary suspension of J&J due to concerns over blood clot side effects.

Subsequently J&J vaccine roll out has resumed from 28 April, with additional doses of 325,260 Pfizer vaccines procured in the first week of May. A similar amount of weekly vaccine doses is expected to arrive through May for a total of 1.3 million doses by the end of the month. Thereafter, the supply is expected to increase notably to more than 636,000 per week in June.

South Africa is also one of the only countries on the African continent that is manufacturing vaccines. The concern raised is less about South Africa's ability to procure vaccines. Rather, it is the effective distribution thereof. Private companies are being relied on to assist with this.

The roll out programme is currently outlined as phase 1 focusing on the vaccination of healthcare workers as part of the Sisonke implementation study, which resumed on 28 April. Since then, 26,000 healthcare workers have been vaccinated, with the health department targeting 500,000 inoculations by the end of the study.

Plans are in place to inoculate 16.5 million people from May to October with the aid of private healthcare providers, which will buy shots from the national government. This forms part of the phase 2 of the rollout, targeting vulnerable individuals and essential workers. Phase 3 of the rollout, which will open up the shots to the rest of the country, are expected to start in November.

What about the South African Variant?

South Africa has managed to end its second wave with only mild lockdown restrictions, without travel bans or border closures or business closures, and without the help of vaccines. This despite the fear internationally associated with the 501Y.V2 variant (from the B.1.351 line). The variant has not been associated with more severe disease or increased mortality, and vaccines have been shown to be effective against this variant.

Lastly, what life is like in South Africa right now

Despite what you may be reading in media or hearing from politicians, day-to-day life in South Africa has adjusted to a new normal, where protocols are strictly adhered to, whether you're visiting the grocery store or having a meal at a restaurant. South Africa has instituted strict health and hygiene protocols for hospitality establishments, which include social distancing, limited gathering size, curfew from midnight to 4am, hand sanitising, obligatory mask wearing, recording of patrons for track and tracing purposes, including temperature checks and contact detail recording. Residents and visitors may frequent conferences, go out for a meal with friends and family, travel across the country with ease to the extent where it feels very safe and normal for us to travel. As a result domestic tourism is alive and well with South Africans, as well as a few international visitors who have not been put off by the fearmongering they read, enjoying the diverse and excellent tourism experiences the country has to offer.

Sources:

Onne Vegter*, Wild Wings Safaris (SATSA Member) | [South Africa is Travel Ready](#) | [Visitsouthafrica.info](#)

*This is an example of an association at work. We are fortunate to have and are grateful to SATSA Member, Onne Vegter, for the collation of research into the issue which he is willing to share to assist his industry peers.

For more information, contact communications@satsa.co.za.