

GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI



PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT

COVID-19 UPDATE

The events of this week have fairly raised alarm bells and anxiety among many Emaswati owing to the high increase in coronavirus infections marked by four new deaths. It took the Kingdom two months to reach 600 cases and only 20 days to reach 1200 infections. This phenomenon of a sharp rise in cases has been observed in several countries in Africa and across the globe over this period.

While the numbers are undesirable, they have strengthened our resolve to stand up to this pandemic to ensure that the safety and livelihoods of Emaswati is secured.

We are dealing with an ever evolving enemy which is always ready to strike and we have no other option but to keep up our guard and pace of intervention. This will, inevitably, be a long road to travel and certainly a marathon, not a sprint to the finish line. And we need to be consistent as individuals in taking full responsibility for our lives and that of others by fully adhering to all health advice and precautions of mitigating the spread of the virus.

No Country, Government or entity will be able to wipe out the virus on its own, but collective and consistent individual responsibility will afford us the opportunity to win this war.

Health

It is now evident that community transmission has been established in identified hotspots in the Manzini region and some parts of the Hhohho region. The Lubombo and Shiselweni regions have clusters that have a high potential to turn into “wild fires” if not urgently attended to.

The Ministry of Health will soon embark on a ‘Door to Door Campaign’ contained in a six point plan to halt the spread of COVID-19, starting in the Manzini and Hhohho regions and eventually spreading throughout the country. This plan will focus on education, finding cases, testing, treating, isolating and tracing contacts. May we appeal for a high level of cooperation from Emaswati as we implement this plan.

At a time when more confirmed cases are identified, it goes without saying that more space will be required for isolation and quarantine. We are increasing the number of beds at Mavuso Isolation Centre as well as exploring other options which will be communicated to the nation in due course. Again, Government requests Emaswati to adhere to the stipulated guidelines of isolation and quarantine.

As the pandemic continues to accelerate, we can expect to see a gradual increase in cases across the country in the coming days as the Rapid Response Teams intensify contact tracing.

Education and Training

On Monday 6 July 2020, high schools and tertiary institutions re-opened successfully for completing classes. Before the opening of educational institutions, 275 schools were supplied with masks, sanitizers, liquid soap, and water tanks. These commodities are meant to protect both educators and learners against contracting the virus during the teaching and learning period. In addition, preparations are at an advanced stage to supply teachers with face shields to reinforce their safety.

Currently, the Ministry of Education and Training is continuing with the necessary inspections of reopened schools to ensure compliance with COVID 19 protocols. Reports received by Government from the four regions indicate that many schools are coping with the “new normal”. Learners are being oriented on COVID-19 to adhere to safety and precautionary measures.

May I reiterate the advice extended to learners by the Ministry to refrain from roaming the streets but to return home immediately after classes to minimise chances of exposure to the virus. As with everyone, but more so with people in groups and on the move, teachers and learners are encouraged to strictly adhere to health guidelines at all times.

We recognise the wonderful work done by School Administrators, School Committee members, teachers and learners during this period. The role of parents in this drive cannot go unnoticed. His Majesty’s Government is very appreciative to our development partners, the business community, Non-Governmental

Organisations (NGOs) and philanthropists who contributed to the success of this re-opening process.

Sports

Government is commencing a phased reopening of sporting activities in the Kingdom. Sports have been segmented into three categories being; high risk, medium risk and low risk. This categorisation is informed by the nature of the respective sporting codes. Low risk sports are the non-contact sports where social distancing is possible. Medium risk sports are those with moderate risks to athletes and personnel - particularly stemming from sharing or multiple use of the same equipment. High-risk sports are those with close physical contact where social distancing is not possible.

Only sporting codes categorised as low-risk will be allowed to start from Monday 13 July 2020. These are Angling, Athletics, Cricket, Cue Sports, Cycling, Darts, Equestrian, Golf, Shooting, Tennis and Teqball. They are only allowed to resume under the following strict conditions;

- There shall strictly be no spectators at both training and competition venues. Only participating athletes and officials should be present.
- Frequent sanitisation of training & competition equipment and high touch surfaces.
- Daily temperature screening and recording of all athletes and personnel attending and conducting training and competition. A record book with recorded temperatures as well as contact

details of all attendees should be kept for ease of contact tracing.

- Compulsory provision of sanitisation and hand washing supplies at all training and competition venues.
- Adherence to two metre social distancing by coaches and other personnel present during training sessions & competitions.
- Adherence to social distancing measures when travelling to and from training and competition venues, and avoiding congested modes of travelling.
- Wearing of appropriate protective gear like face masks and gloves by coaches and other present personnel at training & competitions.
- Active athletes and match officials do not need to wear masks but all other personnel present, including substitutes must wear masks.
- Proper cleaning of communal facilities at training and competition venues in between usage.
- Cleaning and sanitisation of shared training and competition equipment prior and in between training sessions.
- Athletes and officials who are unwell or those living with chronic diseases should not attend training and competitions.
- There should be no sharing of towels and athletes and officials shall not use communal change room showers. Instead, athletes and officials should make use of home facilities for refreshing after each training session and competition.

- In instances where an athlete or official shows COVID-19 symptoms, call the toll free line 977 immediately.

Government has tasked the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs to conduct regular inspections to monitor compliance in training and competition venues. Any sporting association found not adhering to the prescribed protocols will be immediately banned from continuing with their activities.

It is crucial to emphasize that all sporting activities categorised as medium and high risk remain suspended. Government will continue to monitor the situation on the ground and guided by health advice, we will consider reopening other sporting activities in the future.

Unpaid layoffs relief fund update

Last month Government announced the establishment of a Relief Fund directed towards providing compensatory relief to all employees who have been laid off without pay in this period of COVID 19.

Government appointed the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) to be the Administrator of this Fund, working hand in hand with a tripartite Management Committee composed of Government officials, a representative of the Eswatini National Provident Fund, employers' and workers' representatives, respectively.

I am happy to report that the first batch of payments will be made today, 10 July 2020, where a total of 1949 employees will be paid. Subsequent payments will be made every Friday until the current figure of laid off employees is exhausted. All employers who laid off their employees without pay due to COVID 19 are encouraged to file claims without delay.

Opening of businesses

As Government continues to ease the economy with more businesses opening up on Monday the 13 July 2020, we cannot over-emphasise the importance of complying with pronounced COVID-19 measures and guidelines. Government, through the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Regional Administrators and the National Disaster Management Agency has assembled a regional inspectorate task team which conducts inspections on businesses across the Kingdom.

The inspectorate team is on the lookout for businesses that do not comply with COVID-19 guidelines using indicators such as; business structure, sanitisation stations, social distance markings, face masks, general health and safety, trading licences as well as general business operations, including unfair business practices and price inflation.

Guidelines for gatherings

We also announced new Covid-19 regulations on gatherings last week. Since then Government, through the Ministry of Home Affairs, has trained different stakeholders and religious leaders on the implementation of the new regulations in preparation for the increase in attendance numbers effective from 19 July 2020. All faith organisations intent on increasing the number of congregants per sermon should apply through the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Application Forms have been developed and can be obtained at the Ministry of Home Affairs Offices Headquarters and all Regional Immigration Departments, Regional Administration Offices, Mother Bodies of faith based institutions and from the Government and NDMA websites. All people attending funerals, weddings, religious events and community meetings are strongly advised to abide by these regulations and strictly observe COVID 19 health precautions.

We have been made aware of instances where some Emaswati are reported to be holding night vigils in some parts of the country. Night vigils remain banned. There are more reports of house parties as well. These are not allowed as they present a fertile ground for the transmission of the virus.

Access to food assistance

More than 330,826 people have benefited from the food assistance programme. The number of recipients has exceeded the initially targeted 301, 762 beneficiaries. The success of this programme is a result of assistance from the Kirsh Foundation, development partners and many local companies which donated food commodities to the NDMA. Government will continue rolling out the food assistance programme to the most vulnerable members of our society even during this month of July.

Government has also rehabilitated 50 boreholes in communities across the country where people did not have access to clean water. This is an ongoing yet important exercise which aims to ensure that Emaswati do not only have access to safe drinking water but access potable water to use for hand washing and adhering to proper hygiene protocols.

Fuel shortages

Government has noted the volatility of the fuel supply situation in our main source of supply South Africa which is threatening the fuel supply security in the country. We are closely monitoring the situation working with the oil industry. In meantime Government will work with oil companies to increase fuel volume importation from Mozambique which is our other source of supply.

Some of the oil companies are already importing through Mozambique and also using rail for transportation of diesel. A long term solution to ensure fuel supply security for the country is the development of the Strategic Oil Reserve Facility which the Government is working on.

We have also observed that oil markets are rapidly picking-up resulting in high international crude oil prices and already our neighbouring countries have increased their fuel pump prices since June, 2020. Government has so far continued to cushion the local fuel price increases. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy is monitoring the fuel price situation closely and the public will be notified in the event the markets become highly volatile.

Conclusion

In conclusion may I once again, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, pass our gratitude to all our frontline workers who are at the apex of this battle against COVID 19. Your sacrifice cannot go unnoticed. We recognise that the battle is now becoming very intense and the temptation to give up is high. We would like to encourage you to soldier on and stand resolute and firm.

Government will continue to enable supportive structures on your behalf until this war is over.

As we continue to fight this battle with all our might we are comforted by the unyielding support and counsel of Their Majesties.

It is becoming clearer globally that COVID-19 will remain prevalent for a longer time than initially anticipated and will become part of our normal lives until a vaccine is found. It is therefore crucial that all of us adapt to the new normal, a life of vigilance and hygiene.

Compliance to COVID-19 regulations and advice from health experts cannot be compromised nor should we be fatigued by the endless messages of following the important hygiene practice of regularly washing hands with running water and soap and keeping a distance of one to two metres between each other, wearing masks all the time, staying at home and avoiding crowded places.

Let us protect our senior citizens and those with underlying medical conditions. Each and every one of us should be responsible for protecting ourselves and others.

Thank you.

Ambrose Mandvulo Dlamini
PRIME MINISTER

10 JULY 2020