

PERC Weekly Update: COVID-19 Epidemiology and Policy in Africa

Reporting period: 18-24 January 2021 (Africa CDC Epi Week 3)

While reported COVID-19 cases and deaths continue to decrease in most African Union (AU) Member States, the new variant first detected in **South Africa** (501Y.V2) has continued to spread. Across the continent and globally, countries have announced new restrictions limiting travel to/from **South Africa** due to the variant. Most AU Member States have tightened or extended existing internal measures as well, with some announcing new mobility restrictions to combat the second wave (e.g. **Malawi**, **Rwanda** and **Sierra Leone**). In the AU Member States that have reopened schools (e.g. **Kenya** and **Uganda**) there are reports that many students have not returned to the classroom, mainly for economic reasons. The safety of in-person learning continues to be a hotly debated topic.

DISEASE DYNAMICS (Reference: Africa CDC Outbreak Brief #54)

- Between 17-24 January, the 7-day average of reported new **cases** decreased by 17% across Africa, while the 7-day average of reported new **deaths** increased (but only slightly) by 2%. The continent's decrease in new reported cases is largely due to the recent decrease in new reported cases in **South Africa**, which continues to drive continental trends.
- On 19 January, **South Africa's** health minister thanked **South Africans** for adhering to the latest restrictions put in place, [noting](#), "It has been encouraging to know that, despite the mutations (501Y.V2), we are still able to protect ourselves with the amour that we have established. This week has seen some promising signs of decline in transmission."
- The 501Y.V2 variant first detected in **South Africa** has now been [reported](#) in 26 countries globally. In Africa, in addition to being reported in **Botswana**, **Comoros**, [Ghana](#), **Kenya**, **South Africa**, and **Zambia**, there have also been unconfirmed [reports](#) of the variant in **Tanzania** (note, at present, global genomic surveillance is limited).
- On 12 January, the **Ugandan** government [blocked access](#) to social media and messaging apps ahead of the presidential election. The **Uganda** Medical Association [raised concern](#) that the election-related internet shutdown could affect their patients' treatment, especially the access to their insurance and medical records. The 7-day rolling average of tests performed dropped from nearly 4,000 tests on 12 January to under 2,000 tests on 19 January. However, the number of tests performed has increased steadily since.
- In **Eswatini**, health care workers announced a national [strike](#) on 18 January in an effort to receive risk allowance backdated to March 2020. Although nurses in Bungoma, **Kenya** [suspended](#) their strike on 21 January, nurses [continue](#) strike nationally in Kenya, which may effect the number of tests performed and overall health system delivery.

COVID-19 Situation in Africa

Data shown through Week 3: 18 - 24 Jan 2021

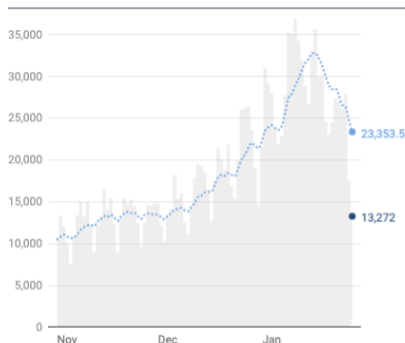
Continent overview

Total Cases

7-day average

24,794

-16.87% week-over-week change



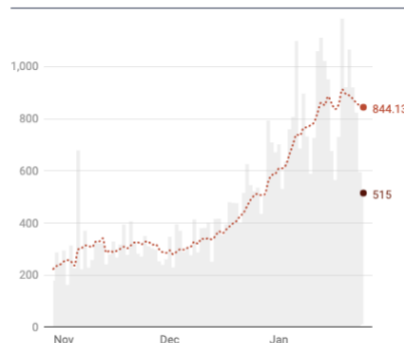
Source: Africa CDC - Created with Datawrapper

Total Deaths

7-day average

891

+2.11% week-over-week change



Source: Africa CDC - Created with Datawrapper

Total Tests Conducted

7-day average

164,013

-7.01% week-over-week change



Source: Africa CDC - Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1. Africa CDC epidemiological data on PERC hotspot [dashboard](#)

For more information on the disease situation, PHSM implementation and adherence in Africa, as well as PERC survey findings, please visit the PERC [website](#).

Hotspot Warning Levels



Figure 2. Map of AU Member States by hotspot level on PERC [dashboard](#). This system is intended to highlight AU Member States in need of attention due to an increasing or widespread outbreak. For specifics on calculations, refer to the dashboard [methodology](#). The delineation of the international and other boundaries used on this map don't imply official endorsement or acceptance by the Africa CDC. Level 0 countries have no data reported.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL MEASURES (PHSM) HIGHLIGHTS

The table below highlights changes in public health and social measures (PHSMs) by PERC hotspot level in Epi Week 3. The up arrow (↑) indicates tightening or extension of PHSMs and the down arrow (↓) indicates loosening of PHSMs.

<p>Level 4: Red</p> <p><i>A very widespread or fast-growing outbreak</i></p>	<p>↑ Cote d'Ivoire reinstated a State of Health Emergency until 28 February, which includes stricter enforcement of PHSMs, including face masks in public areas.</p> <p>↑ Eswatini announced a ban on public gatherings of any size, with an exception for burials.</p> <p>↑ Lesotho introduced a nighttime curfew and limited attendance at funeral services.</p> <p>↑ Malawi introduced new lockdown measures, including school closures, a nightly curfew, and a restriction on gatherings of 50 or more people. Additionally, a group of Malawians who were detained after returning from South Africa mounted a protest at the Mapanga Prison Training College, demanding that their passports be returned and they be released to their homes, in defiance of the country-wide quarantine protocols.</p>
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	<p>↑ Namibia extended a nationwide curfew and the 50-person limit on public gatherings until 3 February.</p> <p>↑ Rwanda reintroduced a 15-day lockdown in the capital city of Kigali. Dr. Sabin Nsanzimana, Director-General of the Rwanda Biomedical Centre, explained that the measures were imposed after a recent spike in positive test results, which “can be blamed on the complacency of the masses during the festive season.”</p> <p>↑ South Africa closed 20 land border posts for general entry on 11 January and delayed reopening of schools until at least 15 February. The closures led to major congestion at border crossings, with some people reportedly waiting in line for up to 4 days at Beitbridge border (more than 100 positive cases were traced back to the border).</p> <p>↑ Tunisia announced a suspension on all travel to/from the UK, Australia, Denmark, and South Africa due to the reports of high prevalence of new variants in these countries. Additionally, Tunisia extended a nighttime curfew, prohibited all travel between regions, ordered adults over 65 years of age to stay home, and banned demonstrations. These strict measures have prompted widespread protests due to economic turmoil, with people demanding employment and government aid.</p> <p>↑ Zambia reintroduced a ban on public access to football stadiums and delayed the reopening of schools until 1 February 2021</p>
<p>Level 3: Orange</p> <p><i>A widespread or growing outbreak.</i></p>	<p>↑ Morocco extended a nationwide curfew until 3 February and announced suspension of all travel to/from Brazil, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand after reports that the new variants were detected in these countries. This comes after an earlier suspension of travel to/from the UK, Denmark, and South Africa.</p>
<p>Level 2: Yellow</p> <p><i>A moderate outbreak or the possible start of a growing outbreak.</i></p>	<p>↑ Angola suspended flights from Brazil, Portugal, and South Africa on 24 January due to new strains.</p> <p>↑ Burundi announced land/water border closures and a mass screening campaign at airports lasting until 6 February.</p> <p>↑ Nigeria lawmakers have called for a three-month postponement of school reopening. One student on Twitter wrote “Thousands of people are coming from all parts of the country [to attend school] and many... may have contact with COVID-19 victims without being aware.”</p> <p>↑ Sierra Leone announced new COVID-19 restrictions, including a nightly curfew, closure of all entertainment venues, stricter masking regulations, and a new lockdown in Freetown until 8 February.</p> <p>↑ Togo extended a state of health emergency until 15 March, and maintained nightly curfews in specific hotspot regions of the country.</p> <p>↓ Uganda reopened schools for lower grades on 18 January, however, less than 30% of students have returned to the classroom.</p>

<p>Level 1: Green</p> <p><i>Relatively low spread and no evidence of a growing outbreak.</i></p>	<p>↓ Chad reopened places of worship after a two-week closure, although curfews remain in place. The number of new cases reported have started to decrease, however, there have been reports of increased food insecurity and poverty. The World Food Programme anticipates that an influx of refugees from the Central African Republic will further complicate the humanitarian context in Chad.</p> <p>↑ Kenya announced that all travellers entering or departing the country must present a digitally-verified negative COVID-19 test, leading to a surge in discussion about the high prices and economic burden of COVID-19 testing on social media. Kenya reopened schools on 4 January, despite parental concerns over the ability to implement social distancing in the classrooms. However, many students failed to return to school for various economic or social reasons, educators are worried that these students may never return to school.</p> <p>↑ Republic of Congo extended the state of health emergency until 13 February and maintained the nighttime curfew in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire.</p>
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Figure 3. Sources: [Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker](#); [Novetta Mission Analytics](#)