

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

Reporting period: 25-31 January 2021 (Africa CDC Epi Week 4)

Reported cases are decreasing in Africa following the implementation of stricter public health and social measures (PHSMs) headed into—and immediately following—the December holidays. Most African Union (AU) Member States have kept these tighter PHSMs in place in an effort to sustain decreasing caseloads and prevent the spread of new variants. Where cases are increasing, a number of new PHSMs were announced in Epi Week 4 (25-31 January)—namely, lengthier curfews, stricter limitations on the number of people allowed to gather, and bar/restaurant closures.

DISEASE DYNAMICS ([Reference: Africa CDC Outbreak Brief #55](#))

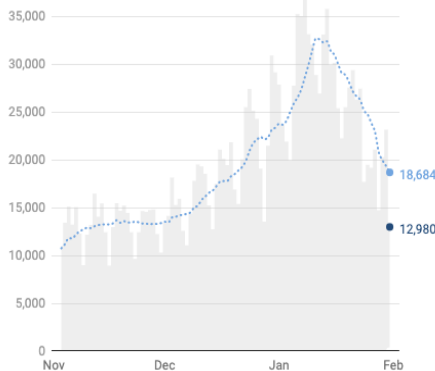
- Between Epi Week 4 (25-31 January) and Week 3 (18-24 January), reported new cases fell by nearly 30% across the continent, and by almost half in **South Africa**. Excluding South Africa, reported new cases fell by 11% across the continent. However, about half of AU Member States sustained increases, indicating the second wave is not yet over.
- The majority of new cases reported continue to be from the Southern region (54%), followed by the Northern (21%), Western (16%), Eastern (7%) and Central (2%) regions.
- **South Africa** is still reporting the highest number of new cases of all AU Member States and the 501Y.V2 variant continues to spread across the continent. To date, there are seven AU Member States that have reported presence of the 501Y.V2 variant: **Botswana, Comoros, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia**.
 - WHO [noted](#) that the new variants, coupled with a lack of adherence to PHSMs and year-end gatherings, led to a ‘perfect storm’ that caused the second wave in Africa. Dr. Matshidiso Moeti (WHO) said, “We must stick to our guns and double down on the tactics we know work so well—that is mask-wearing, handwashing and safe social distancing.”

Total Daily New Cases

7-day average

18,684

-25.7% week-over-week change



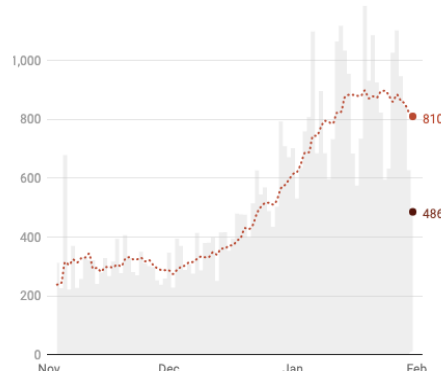
Source: Africa CDC - Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Total Daily New Deaths

7-day average

810

-9.7% week-over-week change



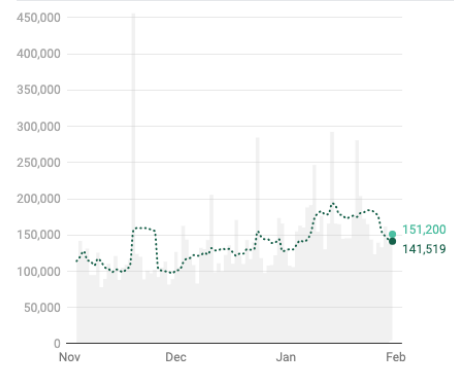
Source: Africa CDC - Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Total Daily New Tests Conducted

7-day average

141,519

-23.2% 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](#).

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL MEASURE HIGHLIGHTS

Hotspot Warning Levels

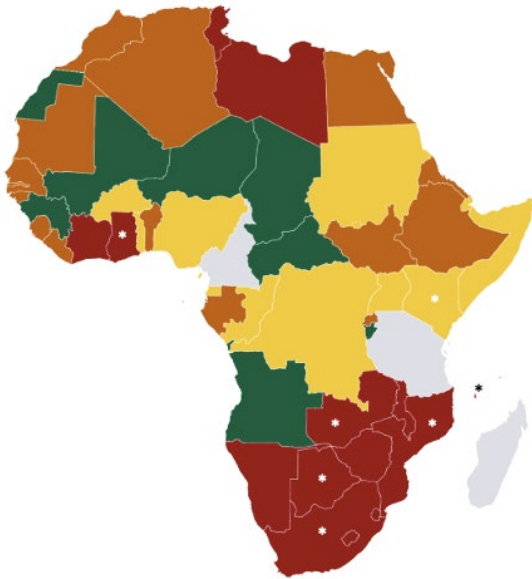
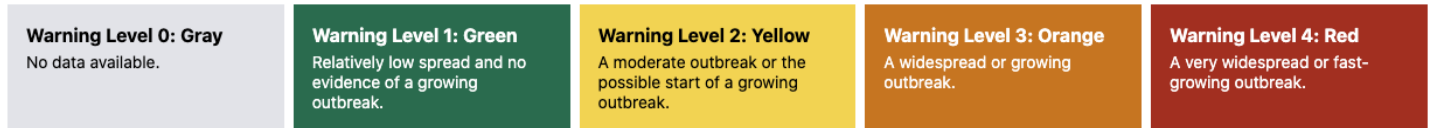


Figure 2. Map of AU Member States by hotspot level on PERC [dashboard](#). This system is intended to highlight AU Member States in need of attention due to an increasing or widespread outbreak. For specifics on calculations, refer to the dashboard [methodology](#). AU Member States with asterisk (*) reported presence of the 501Y.V2 variant (note: at present, global genomic surveillance is limited.) The delineation of the international and other boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the AU and Africa CDC.

The validity of the hotspot warning levels is dependent on the data quality, reporting frequency and testing strategy being implemented within specific AU Member States. Interpret cautiously for countries with low testing rates.

The table below highlights changes in PHSMs by PERC hotspot warning level based on data from [Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker](#). An up arrow indicates new PHSMs announced; a horizontal arrow indicates PHSMs extended; a down arrow indicates PHSMs loosened/expired.

Country	PHSM Trend	PHSM Change
Warning Level 4: Red A very widespread or fast-growing outbreak.		
Botswana	↑	Botswana extended a nighttime curfew and prohibited the sale/consumption of alcohol until 28 February.
Ghana	↑	Ghana reimposed a ban on social gatherings on 31 January. Schools, which reopened in January after a 10-month closure, will remain open for now.
Lesotho	→	Lesotho extended COVID-19 restrictions, including a nightly curfew and limits on public gatherings, until 3 February.

Seychelles	↑	Seychelles extended COVID-19 restrictions, including a nightly curfew, a ban on social gatherings, and school closures until 15 February.
Zimbabwe	↑	Zimbabwe announced a two-week extension of nationwide lockdown measures until 15 February.
Warning Level 3: Orange A widespread or growing outbreak.		
Gabon	↑	Gabon has adjusted the nighttime curfew to begin two hours earlier, from 8pm-5am.
Guinea-Bissau	↑	Guinea-Bissau reimposed a state of calamity until 22 February, which includes mandatory use of masks in public, a ban on gatherings of more than 20 people (except funerals, which can have up to 50 people). It also closed down schools and canceled Carnival, the nation's largest festival.
Rwanda	↑	Rwanda expanded a free testing campaign in the capital city of Kigall to all persons 25 years and older.
Senegal	→	Senegal extended a state of emergency in the Dakar and Thies regions until 20 February. Continued restrictions include a nightly curfew, mandatory mask-wearing, and a ban on public gatherings.
Warning Level 2: Yellow A moderate outbreak or the possible start of a growing outbreak.		
Nigeria	→	Nigeria extended Phase 3 COVID-19 restrictions until 23 February. President Buhari also signed the COVID-19 Health Protection Regulations 2021 policy, which established national laws for combating COVID-19 (e.g. mandatory mask use in public) and outlined fines/punishment for violating guidelines and restrictions.
Warning Level 1: Green Relatively low spread and no evidence of a growing outbreak.		
Chad	↑	Chad extended a nightly curfew in the capital city of N'Djamena and surrounding provinces after an uptick of cases in the area.
Mali	↓	Mali reopened schools on 25 January after several delays.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS IN NEWS ARTICLES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- In South Africa, social media users expressed frustration toward international media outlets for labelling the new strain as “South African,” fearing that this may foster stigma. However, across the continent, the variant first detected in South Africa continues to drive discussions on social media about COVID-19 (and how to prevent it).
 - In **Tanzania**, social media users use hashtags such as #PostYourMaskAndGo to encourage people to take the virus seriously despite misinformation from the government. One church leader noted that he had seen a sharp rise in funeral services, attributing it to a “possible new wave of [COVID-19] infections”.
 - In **Malawi**, social media users encouraged others to “double up on masks” and not to “depend on only the cloth masks anymore and get surgical masks”.

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- There has been daily [protests and civil unrest](#) in **Tunisia**. More than 1,000 young demonstrators have been arrested after taking to the streets to express their frustration over the current economic situation. Further violence erupted after the government extended curfews and banned demonstrations. Local traditional media outlets cited doctors describing hospitals at full capacity.
- In **Malawi**, the Female Sex Workers Association [protested](#) over the weekend, highlighting how the imposed curfew and closure of bars/restaurants has left them without income. The association warned of problems with food security and access to HIV treatment. Across the continent (and globally), the impact of COVID-19 and PHSMs on sex workers' livelihoods has been dire, and often overlooked (e.g. media reports from [Kenya](#), [Zimbabwe](#) and [South Africa](#)).
- The **Zimbabwe** Medical Association (ZIMA) reported that more than 1,500 health care workers had contracted COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, with at least 8 dying. The statement came in response to misinformation [spread](#) by the minister of information in **Zimbabwe**. ZIMA wrote, "Let us refrain from denigrating and abusing our frontline workers who are doing their best under trying circumstances. Instead let us give them all the necessary support to fight the pandemic."