



Briefing statement on the re-opening of the borders and ports of entry for international travellers

Wednesday, 30 September 2020

Fellow South Africans, esteemed travellers and visitors to our beloved country and members of the media, thank you for allowing us, the Ministers tasked with immigration, tourism, health, transport and international relations and cooperation the opportunity to come before you to explain and to give necessary clarifications on how the South African borders will be reopened for international travel from 1 October 2020.

We are also here to explain the requirements that the travellers will be expected to abide by as they visit our country.

On 15 March 2020 President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the National State of Disaster in terms of the Disaster Management Act. In his address President Ramaphosa announced that government was taking urgent and drastic measures to manage the spread of COVID-19 infections, protect the people of this country and reduce the impact of the virus on the society and the economy.

One of the measures announced by the President entailed the introduction of restrictions on international travel and the closing of borders and ports of entries until the COVID-19 infection rates were reduced into manageable levels. On 20th September 2020, President Ramaphosa announced that the country was moving to Alert Level 1 of the Risk Adjusted Approach. Under Alert Level 1, the country eased some of the stringent restrictions which were imposed on citizens under lockdown.

He further announced that on 1 October 2020 South African borders will be opened for business and leisure travel for international traveller's subject to a number of restrictions for travellers. These restrictions included that all travellers visiting the country will be expected to abide by the regulations which include mandatory wearing of masks at all times, practising social distancing in public spaces, regular washing or sanitizing of hands and presenting a negative COVID-19 test result not older than 72 hours from the time of departure.

EASING OF TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

As a country we have adopted a gradual reopening of borders and ports of entry for international travel for business, leisure and other travel guided by the communique published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Public Health on considerations for international travel on 30 July 2020. The gradual reopening of borders and ports of entry informed by a cautious approach means that a limited number of ports of entry and borders will be opened from 1 October 2020. In reopening these selected ports of entry and borders we will be guided by epidemiological and transmission rates both in South Africa and the traveller's countries of origin.

As Government we will constantly monitor the transmission rates both in the country and the countries of origin and respond accordingly.

In the past month, the country's health care capacity has significantly improved to treat those infected with the COVID-19 virus. To date the country has conducted over 4 million COVID-19 tests in both public and private health care facilities. Furthermore, the recovery rate is currently at 90 percent and the numbers of those infected with the virus is drastically reducing at an encouraging rate.

Due to the sacrifices made, the cooperation and determination of many South Africans we can now confidently declare that the country now has sufficient hospital capacity, including beds, ICU space and ventilators.

We can confidently say that the country is in a position to manage the number of infections and to provide adequate medical care and treatment for those who present COVID-19 symptoms. These response measures and the cooperation of the South African has been made possible for us to decide to re-open our borders for international travellers and visitors.

The country has also put measures in place to mitigate the risk of resurgence or a second wave of the spread of the virus by improving its contact tracing and isolation measures. One of the ground-breaking innovations that has been introduced is the COVID-Alert APP which alerts subscribers and provides relevant information if they have been in contact with any person who has tested positive for the virus. The APP helps to minimize the risk of spreading the virus.

All these measures have put the country at the cutting edge of managing the spread of the virus. We encourage the international travellers who intend to visit the country to download the APP so that they are able to monitor and minimise their risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

Travellers intending to visit the country will be expected to produce a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test that is not older than 72 hours from the time of departure from the country of origin to South Africa. This test must be conducted by a certified medical practitioner and should have the name and signature of the practitioner who conducted such test.

Upon arrival in the port of entry, the traveller will be screened for any COVID-19 symptoms or for contact with people who have been infected with the COVID-19 virus.

Travellers will also need to provide proof of accommodation address should they need to self-quarantine at the time of arrival in the country.

Should the traveller display any COVID-19–related symptoms or been in contact with an infected person(s), they will be expected to take a mandatory COVID-19 test. This test will be at the traveller's cost. If the COVID-19 test comes back positive, the traveller will be subjected to a 10 day quarantine at a designated site. The accommodation at a quarantine site will be at the traveller's cost.

South Africa has developed a risk categorisation model for different international travellers. This model classifies international travellers according to a scale of high, medium and low risk. High risk travellers are those who come from countries with higher numbers of COVID-19 infections and reported deaths compared to South Africa.

Medium risk travellers are from countries with relatively equal number of infections and death toll to South Africa and low risk travellers obviously originate from countries with lesser number of infections of COVID-19 and death toll than South Africa.

Leisure Travellers from high risk countries will not be permitted.

The exception will be business travellers with scarce and critical skills including diplomats, repatriated persons, investors and people participating in professional sporting and, events will undergo the same health protocol screenings.

If the passport of the traveller from a high risk country indicates that he/she has spent 10 days or more in a low risk country before departure, he/she will be considered to be arriving from a low risk country.

Travellers from medium and low risk countries will only be allowed into the country subject to the prevailing visa requirements.

Airlines from high risk countries are not necessarily banned, but their crew will be required to isolate in facilities at designated accommodation at the cost of their employer.

Long term visa holders who visit the country for business purposes will be allowed to travel to South Africa. These travellers will also be subject to health screenings for COVID-19 symptoms at the port of entry.

In the interest of all citizens, and the continuing public health efforts, South Africa reserves the right to deny entry of any traveller who is travelling from a high risk country for tourism purposes.

RE-OPENING OF AIRPORTS FOR TRAVEL BY AIR

Three airports will be opened and operational for international air travel. These airports are OR Tambo International (in Johannesburg, Gauteng), Cape Town International (in Cape Town, Western Cape) and King Shaka International in (Durban, KwaZulu-Natal). All travellers landing at these airports must present a PCR test which is not older than 72 hours from the time of departure from the country of origin to South Africa. Furthermore, the international travellers should possess a mandatory travel insurance which is supposed to cover the COVID-19 test and quarantine costs. All these travellers will be subjected to COVID-19 screening on arrival. Those who present COVID-19 symptoms which include elevated body temperatures and flu-like symptoms, will be required to take a COVID-19 test which should be covered by the travel insurance. Should the test results come back positive, the traveller will be subjected to mandatory quarantine, which will also be paid for by the traveller or the travel insurance.

TRAVELLERS FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES

To facilitate free movements of people, goods and services from South Africa, SADC and the African continent, travellers from the neighbouring countries are allowed to visit our country.

Travellers from all African countries are allowed and must possess relevant travel documents, and will also be screened for COVID-19 symptoms.

To allow ease of travel from the African countries, 18 borders will be opened. 35 border posts will continue to offer restricted services due to insufficient capacity for screening, testing and quarantine. Travellers who present themselves at borders which are unable to accommodate them will be directed to the currently operational border posts for processing.

Daily commuters who reside in cross-border areas/towns and those who are from neighbouring countries including those with relevant work permits and school children and teachers will be allowed to enter and exit the borders for work purposes. These commuters will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and where necessary will be subjected to quarantine and isolation. Furthermore, these commuters will be expected to wear face masks, wash hands and sanitise regularly and practise social distancing measures.

SEA PORTS OPERATIONS

To facilitate ease of transportation of goods and medicines to and from the country, ships will be allowed to dock, load and off-load cargo. Crew members from the cargo ships will be allowed to crew changes. These crew members will also be medically screened for COVID-19 symptoms. Passenger liners for luxury travel are still not allowed to dock and off-load passengers.

Ladies and gentlemen, we want to appeal to all travellers and tourists for cooperation and increased vigilance in observing all the health and hygiene protocols we have announced today so that we stop the spread COVID-19. Even though we celebrate the reduced numbers of infections, there is still no vaccine to the virus.

We should continue to protect ourselves and those who are close to us from the devastating effects of this pandemic. We call on international travellers to enjoy the diverse tourist attractions of this country and to meet our friendly hospitable people.

I thank you.