

The Christian Voice

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COVID-19 WATCH **2296** cases | **514** recoveries | **32** deaths

ON A WEEKEND

Lockdown Curfew leaves many stranded

Police across the country have intensified operations following President Emmerson Mnangagwa's promulgation of a lockdown curfew earlier this week.

Hundreds of people where on Friday turned back from accessing the central business districts across the country by Police for travelling without exemption letters.

Since the announcement of the new restrictions by the President, the number of people entering the CBD has decreased significantly.

However most businesses are still open and operating within the specified times of 8am to 3pm daily.

The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) has also increased the number of roadblocks countrywide, with local roadblocks being set up from the suburbs to town.

In Harare, scores of people were seen walking from Chitungwiza to town-a distance of over 25 kilometres, as early as 6.30am due to transport challenges.

In Kwekwe Redcliff soldiers were seen manning roadblocks and asking commuters to produce clearance letters. Those found without one were asked to disembark from ZUPCO and allegedly asked to cut firewood for the army as a form of punishment.

Yesterday at Kwekwe terminal the soldiers were allegedly beating commuters who were waiting for ZUPCO. The commuters were told Curfew has started. Yet there was no ZUPCO the buses were very few failing to copy with the demands of commuters until after 6pm

According to various media reports, more than 1 000 people were arrested on Wednesday



Commuters in Harare wait for buses

countrywide for defying Covid-19 national lockdown regulations.

Police officers have been deployed to monitor movements and to conduct road campaigns with a lot of defiance amongst motorists in particular during the Covid-19 lockdown.

"It is worrying that people are disregarding the rules that have been set for their own safety," said Bulawayo Provincial spokesperson Inspector Abednico Ncube during an interview.

Police officers have been randomly approaching people in the CBD and asking for their exemption letters. A number of vendors who did not have the letters were detained by army personnel before they were asked to pay a fine.

"I am expected at work each day on time, and even if I leave at 3pm I hardly ever make it on time to catch the bus before the 6pm curfew. It's unfortunate that Zupco buses are the only

mode of transport available, but are unable to cope with the large numbers of passengers," said Rejoice Shumba, a resident in Masvingo town.

However in Gweru transport has not been a factor during this lockdown period, yet many people are unable to move around as they do not have permission to do so.

"Transport is available, but most people don't have letters to go to town which is a requirement so far. Yesterday police on horseback dispersed people from the CBD," said Pastor Makore the Gweru hub coordinator.

Following the new regulations, yesterday at 19:30hrs past the curfew time, there were still long queues at Zupco bus terminus and there were allegations that the security personnel were forcing people to walk back home. Writing on twitter, @RealBeefactor said most of the Zupco buses were overloading passengers.

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Lockdown Curfew leaves many stranded

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“Police and soldiers are forcing people to walk back home in this cold and Zupco is overloading so as to ferry everyone home. Now we know where Covid-19 transmissions come from,” he said.

Giyani Moyo who stays in Bulawayo’s Cowdray Park suburb, yesterday had to walk back home so as to beat the curfew time. He said the government should consider using the train to ease Zupco buses from the pressure of being the sole transporter.

“The blame is on those responsible for public transport who just cannot anticipate passenger trends and offer alternatives in good time. The train could ease the pressure,” he said.

Pastor Rabson Zikhali from Tsholotsho said people were being arrested for not wearing masks. He went on and said there was a shortage of Zupco buses and people are now using private vehicles to get into the business centre.

In Chinhoyi, Pastor Tafadzwa Mafukidze said

most people were complying to the lockdown; only a few were caught on the wrong side of the law. He said there was less traffic in the city centre as the police officers are enforcing the lockdown.

“Queues are seen at banks especially in the morning. From about 1pm people were now starting to get out of town. The number of people travelling to town has been decreasing because people fear being arrested as some do not have exemption letters,” he said

Transport is a challenge and private owned taxis are operating illegally as they are seeing the gap that is being created by the Zupco buses. He said for the past days since the announcement of the curfew, people have been resorting to walking back home.

“The transport system has not been coping and the mshika shika guys are slowly coming back and charging USD0.50 one way. As the transport situation is bad, most people are resorting to walking to and from town,” he said.

Deplorable state at quarantine centres fuelling Covid-19 cases

As the number of Covid-19 positive cases continue to rise, the deplorable state at quarantine centres has been an agent for the sudden surge.

Quarantine centres have become synonymous with high cases of escapees who are allegedly bribing security personnel to escape from the centres. Inconsistent food rationing, erratic testing regimes and rampant bribing are some of the ill vices that have been phased in at most quarantine centres. Recently two brothers from Madaulo area some 90 km east of Beitbridge town infected their relatives after escaping from the quarantine centre.

A snap survey carried out by The Christian Voice noted that some quarantine centres had a myriad of challenges ranging from poor ablution services to shortages of space.

At Insinga quarantine centre it was noted that there was shortage of toilets therein compromising health standards as some of the returnees are said to be not keen on cleanliness. As a result of this, this publication learnt that authorities were planning to move them to Gifford but feared cross infections as some were said to be positive cases.

Furthermore at Gifford High school which is one of the quarantine centres in Bulawayo, 17 returnees stationed there are said to be also waiting for their tests results thereby delaying their release from the centre. The delays in getting these results have in the past been condemned by many people. Recently

an alleged Covid-19 related death was detected in Binga well after the patient had died thereby exposing those who might have had contact with him. Meanwhile quarantined nurses at Mpilo were left in quandary after authorities failed to relocate them to Elangeni Training Centre. It is reported that the first batch of student nurses went to Elangeni but the second batch could not manage there due to lack of space. The hospital was said to have resolved to provide space for the student nurses who were positive and the idea was to separate them but this was met with resistance.

“Some student nurses refused to leave their rooms, saying they would rather stay in their rooms. A ward C1 was assigned but the students refused to leave their rooms,” said a source.

Coincidentally the hospital also reportedly discovered that some student nurses who tested positive could have been infected outside the institution.

“Some of the students were on leave and it seems three quarters of the cases are from local transmission as they were never in the wards. Yes, the medical profession is risky but when we test patients, they are clean and nurses are the ones who are bringing it to patients.

“We can’t say the student nurses were infected on the job, as their lessons end at 1pm. The student nurses are given face masks, gloves, sanitizers and are sanitised upon entering the classroom,” sources said.

The sources also noted that the hospital was still in the process of preparing space and had decided to withdraw lessons for two weeks to deal with the Covid-19 situation, which had flared among the student nurses. Reached for a comment, Mpilo Nursing School Principal tutor Charity Nyandoro, referred questions to the hospital’s management and the Ministry of Health and Child Care.

Mpilo Hospital, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Dr Solwayo Ngwenya, said Covid-19 related matters were handled by the City’s health department.

“Anything related to Covid-19 is a public health matter,” he said.

Ministry of Health and Child Care Acting Permanent Secretary, Dr Gibson Mhlanga, said these were operational issues which must be dealt with by officials on the ground.

“Not all issues come to the national level. You must talk to the officials on the ground who must tell us in advance so that we prepare responses. I haven’t heard of it and like now I don’t know if it’s true,” he said.

Acting Bulawayo Provincial Medical Director, Dr Welcome Mlilo, said he would have to investigate further as to his knowledge, Elangeni was not fully occupied.

“I think the Mpilo was advised to cater for its student nurses’ isolation as United Bulawayo Hospital (UBH) is doing the same. Perhaps this is the direction the City’s Health Department advised but I will look into the matter,” he said.

Intermittent Econet network blues disrupt business

Many subscribers and businesses in Bulawayo were this Friday left stranded after telecommunications giant Econet Wireless experienced intermittent network challenges.

During the day many people experienced persistent erratic voice connections which was coupled with inability to top up airtime. However subscribers on rival networks Netone and Telecel were not affected by the network blackout.

This is the third time in a space of two weeks that Econet has experienced network challenges thereby compounding subscribers to more woes.

Church services will be affected heavily as most are now being conducted online through social media platforms like facebook and WhatsApp.

The erratic disruption comes after many businesses, educational institutions have embraced online platforms as they work, study from home. Many businesses and individual subscribers who rely on the mobile network for their day to day activities were left stranded today as they could not access the network provider's services. In areas like Beitbridge where traditionally citizens have poor mobile network reception, this sudden disruption had massive disruption to their daily routine. One subscriber from Beitbridge told the Christian Voice how the disruption had affected him.

"This is the second day that we are experiencing network connection in Beitbridge. Generally Zimbabwean mobile, radio and television networks are poor in this side of the country. However this disruption has made it worse. Today I was supposed to attend a Zoom meeting but I couldn't as most people failed to connect. If this persists vital communication



shall be lost," said Theophilus Ngoma, a youth from Beitbridge.

The network also seemed to have affected people and businesses as far as Victoria Falls and Hwange.

"It's fitful. I could not even manage to juice up my phone today. I had vital phone calls that I wanted to make to South Africa but I couldn't. Hopefully the situation will be rectified soon", said Nomqhele Siziba from Victoria Falls.

Qhubekani Ndlovu, a small enterprise mogul based in Nketa also lamented the poor connections that were there today.

"I supplement my income through selling wares at 7 turn, today I could not manage to realise some sales as some of my customers were not able to pay through Ecocash because of this network. People were also not buying juice cards from me as they feared that they were not going to be able to juice up", he said.

Big businesses seemingly were also affected

by the crisis today as customers intending to pay using Ecocash were being turned away, with preference being those with either cash or swipe. The Christian Voice witnessed some customers being turned away at Tilus Supermarket, Bekezela Superette in Nketa 6 for not having cash or swipe, as the Econet problem persisted.

Meanwhile Econet Wireless has issued a statement apologising to its customers for the poor network connection.

"Dear valued customers. We regret to inform you that we are currently experiencing a technical challenge that has affected some voice calls. As a result some of our customers are failing to initiate calls. Our technical teams are working to resolve the issue and we will inform you once it has been resolved. We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused", read part of the statement.

Cities and Towns Update

BEITBRIDGE: Shops are opening at 8:30 am and close at 3pm according to the new national lockdown restrictions. Beitbridge residents are struggling to adhere to the new directive as people are still seen in town at 5pm when shops have closed. People shy away from police when they are patrolling in their areas but as soon as they pass, they go ahead with business as usual. Despite the arrests that have been done by the police on illegal border trading, at Mlamboni

(Limpopo River) people are still crossing to and from Musina.

BULAWAYO: Police have increased the number of roadblocks to the CBD. Many people were sent back home and others detained for travelling without the proper documents. Queues at some shops are slowly disappearing due to the decrease in number of people entering the CBD.

TSHOLOTSHO: People are not yet sure of what will happen during this lock down. People are

being told that due to the defiance that is being shown by the residents of Tsholotsho, patrols will now be done by the police in conjunction with the army. Nurses are still on strike, residents are being returned home as there are no health practitioners to attend them. This has become a huge challenge for the people in Tsholotsho as they cannot access private doctors due to transport challenges.