



HIGH COMMISSIONER

AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION  
PRETORIA

31 March 2020

## LETTER TO AUSTRALIANS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER

Hello everyone

Lockdown Day 5 and I hope you are all well and not suffering cabin fever yet!

We are receiving an enormous number of emails from Australians in the region. This is great and what we'd hoped for as we do want to hear from you and respond to your concerns. It is a bit difficult though for our small team in lockdown to personally respond to all of your emails in a timely way. As many of the questions we're receiving are common for many people I think the best way forward is to address the key issues we're hearing in your emails in my letters. Rest assured though if you have individual concerns, particularly if these relate to medical or other vulnerabilities that you have, we will do our best to get back to you personally.

### 'Repatriation' Flights

I know many of you are keen to hear news about both Australian government assisted and other possible departure options out of southern Africa.

We are receiving information on some flights being organised from countries in the region by other governments. If we receive confirmed advice that Australians are able to utilise such flights we will be in touch with you. Unfortunately though these flights are proving difficult to confirm given lockdown restrictions, border closures, and local government processes throughout the world.

I've also seen media today in relation to South African Airways (SAA) arranging 'repatriation flights' for travellers throughout the region. We are in touch with SAA on this, however no such flights have been confirmed at this stage.

It is important to know too that all such flights will be at the personal cost of the traveller, and passengers would need to also arrange and fund their onward travel to Australia from wherever the flights land, and from information received to date this would most likely be a European destination. Of course isolation/quarantine restrictions in the destination countries would also need to be observed should entry to those countries (rather than transit) be required.

Everyone's circumstances are different and many Australians in touch with us plan to sit tight in South Africa for the time being. In the event we are made aware of flights it would be helpful for us to know if you are interested in departing, and if so some other details that

airlines etc will need to know. So, putting you to work again, could you let us know the following:

- . Are you are interested in departing should a flight be available? If so:
  - Are you and your accompanying family members Australian passport holders or Australian permanent residents? If you have not already done so (and many have) please let us know your passport number and date of birth.
  - If you or your accompanying family members are not Australian passport holders or Australian permanent residents then please refer to the Home Affairs website <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/travel-restrictions> to be aware of the current travel restrictions that are in place. Temporary visa holders require special exemption to be eligible to board any flight to Australia while the restrictions are in place. It is advisable to check the status of your current visa and if required, you can apply for a visa online in in preparation for when flights become available.
- . The address in Australia that you plan to return to (remember that there is currently a mandatory 14-day quarantine at hotels and other accommodation facilities at the port of entry for all travellers returning to Australia.)
- . Do you have any mobility needs or dietary restrictions?

I must stress again that in asking these questions we are not suggesting that departure flights are being arranged. We simply want to be prepared. This information will also help us should we meet with airlines and service providers gathering information in order to restart services and flights in due course.

Information will be repeated and updated where appropriate in each letter as we're having new Australians register each day and we don't want them to miss what's been given to others in previous letters.

Please continue to spread the word to Australians you may know in southern Africa. If they haven't already registered with us please get in touch through [consular.pretoria@dfat.gov.au](mailto:consular.pretoria@dfat.gov.au) Again, the information we really need includes:

- . Full names, dates of birth and passport numbers for yourself and all accompanying Australians;
  - . Where you are located – if this is a hotel please provide the full hotel address, phone number and your room number;
  - . The best way to contact you – email and phone please. We would like to be able to speak to you all individually, but please understand that we are a small office and that we are under lockdown restrictions. Email communication is most efficient from our end, but if this is not possible for you of course phone us on 012 423 6000. We don't currently have reception staff but we're doing the best we can to answer your calls.
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- Advice if you suffer from a chronic medical condition and you are concerned about access to medications or treatment.
- Name and Australian contact information for a nominated family member that we are able to contact on your behalf in the event of an emergency. We are of course bound by the Australian Privacy Act so will not contact other persons about your situation unless it relates to a life-threatening emergency. It would be helpful though if you could confirm your consent for this in your email.

### Information common to all countries

Safety and Security: Whether in lockdown or not it is important to consider your personal safety and security.

Information on security concerns can be found in the “Safety” section of our travel advice at [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) – just type South Africa or the country you are in into the destination box and follow the prompts.

It’s important to be vigilant about your safety even when in lock down – the basics are crucial: ensure your hotel room doors are locked and use the extra safety latch; if you do go out make sure you are back at your accommodation before it gets dark; make sure you watch your wallet, mobile phone and other valuables, and ensure your passport is secure. All those normal common sense precautions but it’s easy to be complacent. We want you to be safe.

Keep in touch: As we continue efforts to ensure we know of all Australians in the region and their location, please let us know if your circumstances change, i.e. if you move address or contact number, or if you return safely home to Australia.

### Summary of country provisions

Please note that there have been recent developments in Botswana and Mozambique.

Country	Lockdown	Dates of Lockdown	International departures possible	All borders closed	Further information
Angola	Yes	27 March to 11 April	No	Yes	Government website: <a href="http://www.minsa.gov.ao/TodasNoticias.aspx">http://www.minsa.gov.ao/TodasNoticias.aspx</a>
Botswana	Partial	Not available	No	Yes	Government website: <a href="https://www.gov.bw/">https://www.gov.bw/</a>
Eswatini	Partial	27 March to 17 April	No	Yes	Government website: <a href="http://www.gov.sz/">http://www.gov.sz/</a>
Lesotho	Yes	29 March to 21 April	No	Yes	Government website: <a href="https://www.gov.ls/">https://www.gov.ls/</a>
Mozambique	Partial	01 to 30 April	TBC	*No	Government website: <a href="http://www.misau.gov.mz/">http://www.misau.gov.mz/</a>

					*Note entry is not possible from South Africa or Eswatini as the borders are closed.
<b>Namibia</b>	Yes	27 March to 16 April	No	Yes	Office of the President: <a href="http://www.op.gov.na/">http://www.op.gov.na/</a> Namibia Ministry of Health: <a href="http://www.mhss.gov.na/">http://www.mhss.gov.na/</a>
<b>South Africa</b>	Yes	27 March to 16 April	No	Yes	Government website: <a href="https://www.gov.za/Coronavirus">https://www.gov.za/Coronavirus</a> <a href="http://www.nicd.ac.za/">http://www.nicd.ac.za/</a> <a href="https://www.sanews.gov.za/">https://www.sanews.gov.za/</a> <a href="http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/">http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/</a>

### **Angola**

A state of emergency has been declared from 27 March to 11 April and a lockdown implemented during this period. People will be required to stay at home and only leave their premises for the purpose of health care and to acquire basic services. All flights in and out of Angola are suspended, land border crossings are closed and passenger ships are banned. Angola has confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus.

### **Botswana**

Botswana declared a State of Emergency on 31 March 2020, following the confirmation of three cases of COVI-19 in Botswana. President Masisi announced that more extreme social distancing measures will take effect from midnight on 2 April until further notice and only essential services will be permitted to operate. Parliament will convene within seven days and agree on the State of Emergency regulations to be implemented. We will advise further when these are released. Currently, there are no scheduled flights, and all land and air borders have been closed to foreign nationals. Doctors, pharmacies and supermarkets currently remain open to the public yet restricted to a maximum of 50 individuals at a time. There is a total suspension of public gatherings of more than 100 people. Please also look at the Botswana Facebook page: Covid-19\_Mohw and ring this Toll free no. 0800 600 740 for further information.

### **Eswatini**

Eswatini announced a 20 day partial lockdown which includes a closure of borders for the movement of people for 20 days from 27 March 2020. There are no international flights during this period. The partial lockdown measures include the suspension of all unnecessary travel between cities, towns and communities, except for instances of providing or acquiring essential services such as healthcare, food, or banking services. All gatherings of more than 20 people are prohibited. Eswatini has confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus.

### **Lesotho**

Lesotho is currently in a full lockdown until 21 April. The borders with South Africa are closed, however essential goods and cargo will be allowed. All persons are expected to remain at their places of residence, except to seek medical attention and purchase essential items. All essential services such as supermarket, grocers, essential banking services, post offices,

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government service departments, hospitals, clinics, doctor's practices and pharmacies will remain open. All gatherings are prohibited. The Lesotho Defence Force and police service have been operationalised to ensure compliance with lockdown measures. Lesotho does not yet have a confirmed case of COVID-19 but you should nonetheless take care to minimise your risk of exposure to COVID-19. For further information see this link <https://www.gov.ls/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Lockdown-Gazette-Lesotho.pdf>.

## **Mozambique**

Mozambican authorities have confirmed COVID-19 is in Mozambique. President Nyusi declared a state of emergency on 31 March, applying from 1-30 April. It is not yet a full lockdown and further details are yet to be released. The announcement imposes limitations on movements of people and border entries. While some commercial flight options still remain, airlines are reducing capacity and cancelling flights to and from Mozambique. You should contact your airline or travel agent to confirm details as soon as possible. All private and public gatherings are prohibited. Most supermarkets, grocery stores, pharmacies and other essential services remain open.

## **Namibia**

Namibia has announced a state of emergency. A 21-day lockdown is effective from 27 March to 16 April which includes a 30-day international travel ban and border closures. Khomas (Windhoek) and Erongo (Swakopmund, Walvis Bay) regions are in full lockdown with restrictions on people movement. People are not allowed to leave their homes during the lockdown period, unless for essential services to pharmacies, food supply stores, courts, banks and for medical reasons. Gatherings may not exceed more than 10 persons and there are restrictions on domestic transportation. Namibia has confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus. For further information ring the Namibian Toll-Free Number 0800-100-100 or the website <https://convid19esswebsite.firebaseio.com/home>.

## **South Africa**

### **Lockdown**

A 21-day lockdown commenced at midnight 26 March and will be in effect until after Easter, to 16 April. It is very important to follow the advice given by South African government authorities, particularly in relation to lockdown procedures and restrictions in place. Information is available at [www.gov.za](http://www.gov.za). Lockdown regulations are enforceable by the police and other law enforcement authorities. Violations will be dealt with seriously and may result in legal action and imprisonment.

We, and our families, at the High Commission are also in lock-down at our homes but will do what we can to continue to keep in touch with you and provide consular advice as best we can, particularly for Australians who may have chronic health conditions or who are particularly vulnerable in other ways.

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Transport options while under lockdown: While of course movements will be heavily restricted during lockdown if you do need to travel, for a medical appointment for example, there are options. The South African Minister of Transport announced on 25 March that e-hailing services such as Uber are authorised to operate but with restricted hours and conditions.

I received a message from Uber on 27 March advising that they are authorised to operate daily for all riders but under restricted hours from 5am to 9am and 4pm to 8pm for permitted travel purposes only. The Uber app will only be available during the restricted operating hours and travelling is restricted to obtaining an essential good or service (e.g. grocery shopping and medical appointments) or rendering an essential service. For UberX, UberGO, UberBLACK, Uber ASSIST, UberVIP there is a maximum of one passenger; for UberXL a maximum of 2 passengers and for UberVan a maximum of 3 passengers. Passengers are requested to sit in the back seat of the vehicle. It is illegal to transport any alcoholic beverages in any vehicle during the lockdown.

Medical: If you have a condition that you take regular medication for it's of course vital that you have ample supplies to see you through. Australian prescriptions cannot be filled in South Africa so if you do need to get additional medications it's important to start thinking about this.

Doctors and pharmacies will remain open during the lockdown. I recommend you visit a GP rather than going to a hospital at this time, unless of course you have an emergency. Your hotel should be able to give you advice on a GP nearby or may have a doctor on call that you can access. I suggest you have a chat with your hotel's concierge or reception about this, including what arrangements they have in place in the event you have some sort of medical emergency.

Visas: South African authorities have advised that there will be no penalty for travellers whose visas expire as a result of the lockdown.

Keep monitoring our social media platforms – Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn - for updates:

*Twitter @AuHCSouthAfrica*

*Facebook @AuHCSouthAfrica*

*LinkedIn [australian-high-commission-south-africa](https://www.linkedin.com/company/australian-high-commission-south-africa)*

and continue to monitor the government's Smartraveller website – both the general COVID-19 bulletin on the main page of the site, and individual Travel Advices for each country, on the website [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au).

As I will say each letter - I and my staff at the High Commission are committed to your safety at this time. It is a challenging period for everyone so please take care and look after yourself and your family and friends.

Warm regards

Gita

Gita Kamath

Australian High Commissioner

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