



**BROADCAST BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, ON
ENHANCED PUBLIC HEALTH AND
SAFETY MEASURES TO PREVENT THE
CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19).
FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE. 18 MARCH
2020.**

Fellow citizens:

Sierra Leone is threatened by the global Corona virus pandemic. It is a public health emergency of global concern.

It is a deadly virus that has infected hundreds of thousands of people all over the world from China and the far east to Europe, America, and some African countries.

The Corona Virus has tested and overwhelmed the organisation, expertise, and vast resources of the healthcare systems of the richest and most advanced countries including China, America, United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain, to name a few.

Like the Ebola virus, it is easily transmitted from person to person.

Like Ebola, it is spread through social contact.

It is spread through contact with respiratory droplets through the mouth, eyes, and ears. If you have flu-like symptoms including fever, cough, and difficult breathing that last three days, you must self-report by calling 117 or at the nearest healthcare facility.

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Corona or COVID-19 is a virus for which there is currently no vaccine.

It can even be transmitted by certain population groups that show no obvious symptoms of an infection.

Like the Ebola virus, the Corona virus can be deadly.

Now, our immediate neighbours, Guinea and Liberia have both reported confirmed cases of Corona virus infections. The deadly Corona virus is in our neighbourhood. It is no longer a question of whether the Corona Virus will come to Sierra Leone, it is a question of WHEN.

Over a month ago, my government began implementing a raft of measures to prevent the incidence of the Corona virus.

We have implemented stringent entry port surveillance measures at our international airport at Lungi and two major land border posts at Gbalamuya and Gendema. We have instituted robust entry port screening, monitoring, and quarantine arrangements.

I have personally assumed leadership of all preparations. I have visited and overseen the diagnostic and isolation unit at

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34 Military hospital; the Lungi International Airport Quarantine facility and airport; and, the Gbamulaya border post in Kambia.

At all those locations and at every public speaking opportunity since, I have publicly called for heightened vigilance. Corona, like Ebola, is a highly infectious and deadly virus.

We have three testing laboratories, an equipped purposely built isolation unit, and we are fully equipping treatment centres. We have also approached a friendly government to support our effort with equipment and medical supplies.

We have triggered public health emergency measures. We have committed some financial resources to preparedness and public health education.

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation has activated the Emergency Operations Centre to Level 2 to coordinate initial preparedness and response. We have activated the Emergency contact number 117. I repeat, 117. An associated call centre will process all calls to this number and act on each call and every information received accordingly.

We have streamlined standard operating procedures to cover screening, quarantine, laboratory, and data management for persons from identified epicentres and sites of incidence of the

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Corona Virus. We have positioned expert contact tracers and disease surveillance units in all district levels.

We have implemented handwashing procedures at most medical institutions and urged citizens to observe limited social contact.

We have alerted our healthcare personnel and strengthened our healthcare systems across the country.

We are determined to prevent the incidence and spread of the virus. But we are also extremely cautious that like Ebola, by the time we identify one positive case, we would have had several dozen disease contacts. We cannot afford to wait for a positive case.

We are not going into imminent lockdown. Our actions and the preventive measures we take now as individuals and as communities are critical to ensuring we don't have to.

This is not a time to panic. I have held consultative meetings with fellow Sierra Leoneans right across board including those persons who managed the Ebola crisis. To my mind, this is a time for close attention to detail, focus, and intense discipline.

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Therefore, I announce here today additional guidance to citizens in order to further enhance our national preparedness.

1. I have directed the military to immediately deploy to our international airport and land crossing points in order to enhance security and support compliance with all public health directives and advisories.
2. Ministries, Departments, and Agencies are urged to collaborate very closely to support and ensure compliance with all preventive measures we have put in place.
3. All government officials are directed to suspend all foreign travel until further notice.
4. Citizens are strongly encouraged to postpone all overseas travel especially to locations with reported cases of the Corona virus. Our country's biggest source of threat is persons who have travelled from Corona infected countries.
5. The Ministry of Health has issued a comprehensive advisory for the administration of quarantine for citizens, legal residents, and visitors who arrive in Sierra Leone. We urge strict compliance. These measures will be monitored and continually reviewed.
6. Citizens are strongly encouraged to tell their family members, their neighbours, and other persons in their

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communities that the Corona virus is already in Liberia and Guinea. It is highly infectious; it is a virus for which there is currently no vaccine; and it can kill.

7. Citizens are therefore strongly urged to avoid physical contact and practice social distancing at all social and public gatherings. This applies to public events including but not limited to football matches, public concerts, social events, religious congregations, weddings, funerals, and other such large gatherings.
8. Citizens with flu-like symptoms, including a fever, cough, and difficult breathing are encouraged to seek immediate medical attention and call 117. *Nor peppeh doctor yousef.*
9. As at the time of Ebola, good personal hygiene and behaviour are critical to preventing the spread of the Corona Virus. Citizens must
 - a. Avoid handshakes and hugs when greeting people;
 - b. Avoid direct contact with persons with cold or flu-symptoms;
 - c. Cover their noses and mouths when coughing or sneezing;
 - d. Wash their hands often with soap, clean water, and use a hand sanitiser.
10. Private businesses, public institutions, event organisers, stores, supermarkets, and market women

should provide enhanced hygiene facilities including handwashing stations with clean water, liquid soap, hand sanitisers at all entrances. They should also ensure that all toilets and common areas are regularly cleaned and disinfected.

11. Operators of minibuses, taxis, and kekehs are urged to minimise congestion and to provide hand sanitisers to passengers. They are also encouraged to call 117 and report persons who are visibly sick with a fever, cough, and difficult breathing.

12. I urge all public and private radio stations; religious leaders; chiefs, tribal authorities and headmen and women; community leaders; local council administrators and leaders; political party leaders and representatives at the ward, constituency and national levels; and, administrators and staff of educational institutions at the basic, secondary, vocational, and tertiary levels; to continually broadcast and reinforce public health education information on Corona virus prevention including hand hygiene, cough etiquette, and social distancing.

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Although there are no confirmed cases in Sierra Leone at this time, we must adopt the foregoing immediately in order to forestall the deadly risk of the Corona Virus.

We continue to actively monitor developments around the Corona Virus and we will announce further enhanced measures including a declaration of a State of Emergency to protect public health and safety.

Fellow citizens, as a nation, we have triumphed together over war, Ebola, and natural disasters. Together again, by the grace of God, *Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala*, and through our collective resolve, vigilance, and determination to strive and thrive as a nation, we will overcome this menace, yet again.

I thank you. God bless you and God bless The Republic of Sierra Leone.