

Hello from Zambia,

I hope you are all keeping well and finding constructive things to do in your time of isolation.

This is my second update about how Zambia is coping with the covid 19 outbreak. It is now over a month since our first case was reported in Zambia, and things are beginning to pick up momentum. When I wrote just under 3 weeks ago, there were 39 recorded cases and now there are 84, and in the last 5 days the increases have been daily. The government has made the wearing of masks in public mandatory and most people have homemade masks which you can buy for about 10p on the streets. People have also been told to stay in their own towns or areas unless it is for essential travel. Unfortunately there is no real guidance on what “essential travel” is, and last week St Stephens had 5 members with deaths in the family, who travelled to the funerals from as far as Livingstone in the South to Kitwe in the North. In Zambia funerals generally last 2 – 3 days with all ladies inside the funeral house sitting on the bare floor as all the furniture has been moved outside to accommodate the men, who sit outside all night under a tarpaulin around a log fire. I spoke to our minister Rev Musonda about this, as I was concerned about the close proximity of the mourners. He assured me that in future he would recommend that members should only support the family at the graveside where they could socially distance rather than go to the funeral house as is the tradition. Another huge cultural shift for Zambians.

When I wrote last, the outbreak was mostly in Lusaka, but now cases have been reported in 3 towns in the Copperbelt, Kabwe in Central Zambia and Kafue towards the South. Worryingly 15 of the 45 new cases are health care workers. This is probably because there is very little available PPE. I spoke to one nurse I know, who said they have to provide their own protective gear such as masks and gloves. I am sure you know from your own circumstances how concerning this is. New information on ventilators is that I have been told that Lusaka’s main hospital only had 2 at the beginning of the outbreak, so I would imagine that countrywide we have less than 50 outside of private facilities.

Another government directive yesterday said that churches, restaurants, barber shops and salons as well as tennis and golf clubs can open up provided they maintain social distancing, masks and sanitisation /hand washing. (Not sure how masks will work in restaurants!) In my view, this can only be for economic and political reasons, not health care. I know in a country like Zambia, lockdown is almost impossible if most people are living from hand to mouth and without essential utilities like water, but these directives do seem to give mixed messages about the importance of social distancing and may be changed again as the virus continues to take its toll. At the moment we only have 3 recorded fatalities.

Our borders are also locked down, meaning that anyone coming in will have to undergo 14 days of quarantine. This and the restrictions in South Africa, has a knock on effect on cargo travelling from there, which supplies 90% of the shelf goods for our supermarkets.

It would be good to hear your news too, stay safe and please pray for Zambia,

Every good wish

Jenny