



THE NIGERIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC: TIME TO LOCK DOWN THE COUNTRY

Regrettably, Nigeria has, during the last one week, seen a dramatic increase in the number of COVID-19 confirmed cases (44 as at the time of writing). It is now time for a national lock down, especially now that the disease has invaded the highest level of our governance threatening our national security! While the effort of individual state governments is lauded, the lock down should be national, with uniform regulations, and led by the federal government.

With a lock down, all citizens are required (as much as possible) to stay at home leaving room only for essential activities that allow for basic functions such as feeding and accessing health care. Only workers needed to provide essential services, such as health care and electricity, will be expected to go out. No social gatherings would be allowed. Details of this will have to be worked out conscientiously.

Why Lock Down Now?

1. Though most of the confirmed cases are imported, and with a few more being contacts of the imported cases, we are beginning to have cases with unclear infection sources. This suggests the possible existence of community transmission and needs to be curtailed early!
2. Though the government and its agencies are working hard at containment, there are reports of people failing to self-isolate as advised. This is complicated by the VIP syndrome that seems to characterize our country, with some refusing to be checked or to self-isolate on arrival into the country. It is also complicated when the conditions that exist in many of our urban slums is considered. It is normally very difficult to trace and monitor contacts in a country like Nigeria (with difficulty in tracking addresses, phones, etc), and this becomes increasingly difficult the more the contacts that have to be traced.
3. It is unclear how widespread the disease might be in the country given the evolving number of cases at this point, and the difficulty in tracking their movements and those of their contacts.
4. A lock down for 4 weeks will help to reduce the number of new importations and provide the environment and condition for clear thinking and planning. In 4 weeks, virtually all COVID-19 cases and contacts should have been discovered or should have recovered.

Lock Down to Prepare

While a lock down will help us reduce transmission and even give time for case management and recoveries, Nigeria will have to reopen sometime. We should use

the lock down period to re-strategize as we provide answers to the following questions:

1. What do we do about new importations when we re-open the borders?
2. How do we enforce self-isolation and or quarantine across the nation?
3. What treatment modalities should we adopt and standardize across the country?
4. Which research areas and activities – drugs, equipment, containment measures, socio-economic recovery, etc – should we fund?
5. What innovative socio-economic safety nets can be provided for the citizens of this country to ameliorate the current and coming effects of this pandemic?

The Academy stands by the governments of Nigeria, and all Nigerians, at this trying time. Nigerians should understand that the measures that need to be taken are challenging but necessary. God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.



Professor K. Mosto Onuoha FAS
President
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