

South African Airways grounds international flights till May over virus

March 20 2020

South Africa's flag carrier on Friday suspended all international and regional flights until the end of May following a travel ban aimed at curbing the spread of coronavirus.

Last weekend President Cyril Ramaphosa closed the border to all foreign nationals from highly-affected countries as infections spiked.

South Africa has so far detected 202 cases of the novel virus, the second-highest number on the continent after Egypt.

"In support of efforts by government in dealing with this pandemic, and in the best interest of our crew, passengers and the public, we have decided to suspend all international and regional flights until 31 May 2020," South African Airways CEO Zuku Ramasiasa said in a statement.

The debt-ridden airline had already cancelled 162 flights this week in response to low demand for air travel.

Domestic services between Johannesburg and Cape Town will continue to operate.

Airlines around the world are being forced to cancel services as countries have clamped down on borders in a bid to control the virus, which has killed at least 10,000 and infected more than 240,000 people since December.

Australia's leading carrier Qantas and German airline group Lufthansa were the latest to slash their long-haul capacity this week as demand has shrivelled.

The global aviation association estimated that up to \$200 billion is needed to rescue the world's airlines.

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