



## **COUNTRY REPORT**

### *Sierra Leone*

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#### **Brief Background**

This working report summarizes the range of measures taken by Sierra Leone in response to the COVID-19 outbreak that can be sourced to a law or policy. As of 3 October 2021, there have been 6,394 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 121 deaths and 4374 recovered in Sierra Leone as reported to the World Health Organization (WHO). For more information, visit the COVID 19 Law Lab website.

#### **State of Emergency/Public Health Emergency**

The President of the Republic of Sierra Leone declared a state of public emergency on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 for 12 months. The authority to do so is vested on the president by the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991.<sup>1</sup> The declaration was as a result of the spread of the highly viral and infectious COVID-19 disease which posed great risk to human life and caused enormous socio economic disruption in the country. The president reiterated that the public health state of emergency was to ensue from 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 for a period of twelve months (12). This was done in order to protect the lives of the people.<sup>2</sup> However the president insisted that the state of public health emergency was not a lockdown and that vendors were not to hike their prices in order to gain more profit as a result of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> The executive arm of government would

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra Leone Const. Act No. 6, Section 29, Sub Section 1: accessed from: <https://covidlawlab.org/item/constitution-4/>

<sup>2</sup> Limitations and Freedoms of Liberty, Chapter III of the Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991) accessed from <https://covidlawlab.org/item/constitution-4/>

<sup>3</sup> Declaration of State Emergency, Sierra Leone, March 24, 2020. Access from <https://covidlawlab.org/item/declaration-of-state-of-emergency-6/>

deploy the armed forces and police in order to ensure compliance.<sup>4</sup> The president reiterated that the government's actions were to benefit the people of Sierra Leone.<sup>5</sup>

**Sierra Leone COVID 19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Project** prescribes for the declaration of outbreak or epidemic by the Directorate of Health Services (the highest decision making body in MoH during any disaster, emergency, and disease outbreak). The **Directorate of Health Security and Emergencies (DHSE)** is responsible for providing public **health Emergency Preparedness** leadership, scientific and technical situational awareness and advice at the national level, working in partnership with other organizations to protect the public.<sup>7</sup> **Sierra Leone ended the** 12 month State of **Public Health Emergency** through a press statement released by The **National Covid 19 Emergency Response Center (NACOVERC)**<sup>8</sup> on Wednesday, March 24, 2021, announcing the lifting of the country's nationwide curfew and the ending of the 12 months State of **Public Health Emergency**<sup>6</sup>.

### **Access to Medicine and Intellectual Property/ Vaccines**

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021 **the World Bank** approved an \$8.5 million grant in additional financing to support affordable and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in Sierra Leone. This is a move aimed at supporting developing countries to access COVID19 vaccines.<sup>7</sup>

### **Disease Surveillance and Technology**

NACOVERC issued another press release on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021 in Freetown Sierra Leone following an article published by the Africanist press on allegedly hidden COVID19 funds which misinformed the citizens of Sierra Leone. **Section 47(4)** of the **Public Management Act 2016 (PFMA)** stipulates that any bank accounts of budgetary agencies, subverted agencies, or other

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Public Notice Curfew Lifted, Sierra Leone (March 24, 2021) accessed from: <https://covidlawlab.org/item/public-notice-curfew-lifted/>

<sup>7</sup> World Bank approves \$8.5 million grant to help vaccinate people in Sierra Leone, *The Sierra Leone Telegraph* (June 9, 2021) accessed from: <https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/world-bank-approves-8-5-million-grant-to-help-vaccinate-people-in-sierra-leone/>

entities in the central government, whether in Sierra Leone or elsewhere shall not be opened or closed except under the authority of the Minister signified by the AG and no bank may open such accounts without authority.<sup>10</sup>

The government of Sierra Leone countered the Press release by listing the bank accounts opened and how much they received between July 2020 and May 2021 for the facilitation of laboratory testing and fines.

On 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021 the **DHSE** issued a public notice for vaccinated individuals and COVID-19 testing e-certificates. The **e-Certificate** would include the date and time the test was conducted. **NACOVERC** stated that test certificates would be available 24-48 hours from the day the swab was conducted.<sup>8</sup> The Government explained that while the new upgrades took effect, exemptions would be temporarily suspended for a 30-day period up to July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Registering of the tests was to be done on the travel portal and payments incurred by the person (inclusive of diplomats). Those wanting to be exempted must have had to register and pay during the suspension period but contact **NACOVERC** to claim a refund at a later date.<sup>9</sup>

### **Isolation and Quarantine Measures**

On March 21 2020, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation issued key facts on the coronavirus and how to mitigate its spread. This included guidelines for visitors/travelers in transit or arriving to Sierra Leone. Travelers from countries that reported 50 or more confirmed cases of COVID were then required to be quarantined at a facility such as a hotel near the airport for up to 14days at their own costs, while those from countries with less than 50 confirmed cases were to be home quarantined for 14days.<sup>10</sup>

### **Movement and Distance Restrictions**

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<sup>8</sup> Public Notice E-Certificate, Sierra Leone (June 10, 2021) accessed from: <https://covidlawlab.org/item/public-notice-e-certificate/>

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Key Messages on coronavirus, Sierra Leone (March 21, 2020) accessed from: <https://covidlawlab.org/item/key-messages-on-coronavirus/>

A public notice testing for local and international travelers was issued by the Directorate of Health Services in conjunction with the National Covid19 Emergency Response Centre (NACOVERC) in Freetown, under the government of Sierra Leone on February 27 2021. Locals were to get tested for free while international travelers were to get tested at a fee following registration on the travel portal.<sup>11</sup> The Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Transport and Aviation and other key strategic stakeholders published attached safety and public health guidelines which are to be strictly adhered to by all arriving and departing passengers at/from the Freetown International Airport.<sup>12</sup> Arriving passengers are expected to get a negative PCR COVID19 test result issued 72 hrs before departure from the country of origin and follow all COVID19 health protocols. Departing passengers are subjected to mandatory PCR COVID19 tests with negative results issued 72hrs before departure at the Freetown International Airport. Costs incurred are to be borne by the passenger and their passports should be verified before check in. At the waiting lounge COVID 19 guidelines must be upheld.

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<sup>11</sup> After registration, a unique ID number is given, followed by testing at an approved location. The travelers are expected to hold a negative COVID-19 test certificate within 72 hours of their flight.

<sup>12</sup> Public Notice, Sierra Leone National COVID-19 Response (Feb. 27, 2021) access from <https://covidlawlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Public-Notice-Testing-is-for-locals-and-international-travellers.pdf>

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