

R140 for a packet of cigarettes in Soweto

By [Mosa Damane](#)

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"I think the government is violating the rights of smokers by banning cigarettes. It is my money and health and I have a right to decide when to quit," says Veli Hlongwane from Maliwa street, Mzimhlophe in Soweto.



Cigarettes are traded despite the Covid-19 lockdown regulations. Legal traders have lost significant income because of the restrictions. Photo: Mosa Damane

"I do adhere to the rules of Covid-19 lockdown ... If a friend asks for a smoke I give because it is their risk not mine, but I don't ask for a skyf anymore, " he says.

"The price of a Savannah fag jumped from R1.50 to R4.00 and the cheapest RG fag jumped from 50 cents to R3.50 ... I smoke three Savannah fags per day, which is R12 a day. The government should reconsider the ban of cigarettes," says Hlongwane.

Sandile Mtshali from Meadowlands zone 11 is a young spaza shop owner with a liquor license. He says he has lost R25,000 in profits due to the ban of cigarettes and alcohol, and he has not received any assistance from the government financially.

"I continued trading until I was arrested by police for selling fags and beer during the lockdown. I've learned my lesson and I won't be on the wrong side of the law again," says Mtshali.



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15 May 2020



Golan Mohammed, an immigrant from Bangladesh who rents a shop in Meadowlands, said he has lost about R20,000 in profits due to the cigarette ban. "The government should give us the money they promised to us, because we are struggling and trading times have also been shortened."

"Go big or go home is the new slogan for the booming business of selling cigarettes in the townships," says Sam Siteo, wearing a homemade mask and selling fruit and vegetables in Meadowlands. "Better a friend with a fag than a friend with a Lamborghini."



Covid-19 knocks tax revenue performance

7 May 2020



Sibusiso (surname withheld) has become a trusted dealer of illicit cigarettes in Mzimhlophe, where he has on display packs of Caesar Gold, Life Virginia King Size, RG blue and imported tobacco.

"This is my way of surviving and making clean money without getting into trouble with the police, but the new laws of banning cigarettes are taking away my bread. At night I sell RG loose for R5 and during the day the normal price is R3.50. A pack of 20 is R50 which is the cheapest RG fongkong (fake) cigarettes. Courtleigh is the most expensive pack which is around R140 in some places and a loose cigarette is R7 each," says Sibusiso.

"All fake cigarettes are very expensive now. Forum, Peter Gold, Malimbo, F1, Rainbow Gold and Remington are selling for R50 where I stock cigarettes next to Bara hospital. I need to get more from my supplier because people are buying in bulk," he says.

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