



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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INTERNAL MEMO

Date:	19 December 2020		
To:	The Honorable Dr ZL Mkhize, Minister of Health	From:	Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on Covid-19

RE-INVIGORATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COVID-19 PREVENTION RESPONSE OVER THE FESTIVE SEASON

Problem

South Africa has officially entered a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, with several provinces experiencing a resurgence in number of infections in recent weeks. On the 10th December 2020, the President announced several regulations regarding gatherings, movements of persons, controlled access to public entertainment areas, alcohol sales and consumptions, and publication of hotspots, with a view to managing this second wave in the country over the festive season.

Task to Committee

Following his address, a combined committee comprising members of the MAC on Covid-19 and the Social Behavioural Change (SBC) MAC met to consider what key behavioural change interventions needed to be strengthened to support implementation of the President's regulations.

Background

Establishing what needs to be done now, requires taking a step back to a few months ago where several advisories on this topic were submitted to the National Department of Health (NDoH). On the 20th July 2020, the MAC on Covid-19 produced an advisory that provided an analysis on the barriers to adherence to public health measures and offered practical strategies to achieve increased self-adherence to Covid-19 prevention and mitigation measures. Six key steps to a comprehensive, multi-sectoral Covid-19 prevention response were highlighted. These included the need for:

1. Appropriate education and training;
2. Building personal skills and self-efficacy;
3. Mobilising social networks and social influencers;
4. A coherent communication strategy;
5. Supportive policies and regulation; and
6. Required provisions, facilities and other resources.

To complement this advisory, the SBC MAC submitted two additional advisories in August 2020 focussing on a) mobilising communities to actively engage with prevention behaviours and b) mobilizing physical resources (i.e. masks, running water and sanitisers) to support the promotion of sustainable social behavioural change.

Recommendations

The Committee notes that the three advisories comprehensively address the barriers to prevention, and outline clear, practical steps that NDoH could take in mounting a comprehensive, multi-sectoral response to address the social-behavioural issues at the heart of Covid-19. Progress has been made in some of the six key steps outlined above, but what is needed now as we head into a Covid-dominated festive season, is a recommitment to implementing measures that have been stalled or partially implemented. Several recommendations require immediate implementation to support the festive season regulations.

Strengthen Covid-19 information

Thus far, efforts have been at the level of developing appropriate information and messaging, but this must be strengthened. For information to take root, it must be contextually relevant, delivered at the level of communities and speak to their lived realities.

We recommend that the President's announcement be translated into all local languages, flighted on local community radio and supported by engagements with local influencers to increase engagement, and possible uptake of the regulations and messages.

Scale up communications

A communications strategy for Covid-19 has been developed by the NDoH. Such a strategy provides the foundation for how the public is invited to take up the preventative measures. The NDoH through the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) group have developed a series of 8 interactive videos that deliver key public health messages about Covid-19 in innovative, diverse and creative ways targeted at multiple audiences that encourage prevention adherence in relatable ways. This is commended. However, roll out of the videos at community level has been sporadic. For wider reach and impact, the videos should be flighted more broadly across television and social media over the festive season. The greatest impediment to implementation are the funds to support this effort.

The Committee recommends that government urgently identifies a mechanism to unleash these resources (for example, through the Solidarity Fund or negotiating with SABC to flight these videos at no cost).

We also recommend that government consider the use of the creative and performing arts to expand the reach of health communication messages about the Covid-19 pandemic. This is the most effective mode of communication in the rural areas, and more so during the festive season. This will require a collaboration with the artists who have a wider audience in the communities, and the youth in particular.

Mobilise all sectors

The festive season asks citizens to make renewed efforts to key public health measures that will keep them and others safe from Covid-19.

To support individual behaviour change, government must engage all sectors, particularly traditional leaders/healers, the religious sector, municipalities, NGOs and community-based organisations, and work through them to reach out to the population. Key actors or influencers, have an increased chance of driving key prevention messages, thus endorsing and supporting individual behaviour change. As we approach a second year of Covid-19, we must move from

interventions aimed at individuals, towards a community based, ecological approach, taking into consideration the lived realities of everyone involved. A culturally sensitive, linguistically appropriate and context-based approach, driven by the local actors who have already earned the target communities' trust, is likely to be successful.

Provide communities with basic services

Adherence to NPIs is a key message we continue to promote. Over this festive season, Government must make renewed efforts to ensure that basic services, such as delivery of water, are available especially in poor resourced areas, to ensure that people can comply with the NPIs such as handwashing.

Gather the prevention evidence

Prevention is key to the ongoing management of the pandemic. We need to commission a survey and focus groups to better understand factors that promote adherence or hinder adherence to NPIs across the population. A rapid evidence synthesis of how other countries around the world have dealt with this issue will strengthen our efforts in developing appropriate prevention and mitigation strategies for this second year of living with Covid-19.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Kind regards,



PROF MARIAN JACOBS

CO-CHAIRPERSONS: MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COVID-19

DATE: 19 December 2020

CC:

- » **Dr S Buthelezi (Director-General: Health)**
- » **Dr T Pillay (Deputy Director-General)**
- » **Incident Management Team**