



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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**INTERNAL MEMO**

Date:	11 December 2020		
To:	<b>The Honorable Dr ZL Mkhize, Minister of Health</b>	From:	<b>Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on Covid-19</b>

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON DECEMBER PERIOD PROPOSAL**

**Proposal from the National Department of Health**

The National Department of Health (NDoH) as requested guidance on their proposal for the Decemer period. The proposal is outlined below:

**It is recommend that as from 21 December 2020 to 08 January 2020 nationally:**

**1. Gatherings**

- (1.1) Restrictions on gatherings (religious and sporting events): maximum of 100 people indoors and 250 outdoors – including religious gatherings.
- (1.2) After Funeral Parties or any gathering relating to the deceased that has occurred after the deceased has been buried or cremated-are prohibited.

**2. Movement of Persons**

- (2.1) Curfew 22H00-04H00.
- (2.2) Commercial/non-essential (including restaurants and bars) establishments to be closed at 21H00 to allow for sufficient time for transit home before enforcement of the curfew.

**3. Alcohol Sales and Consumption**

- (3.1) Alcohol sales restricted to Monday-Thursday 10H00-18H00.
- (3.2) On-site consumption of alcohol up until 21H00.
- (3.3) No consumption of alcohol in public spaces (including parks and beaches).
- (3.4) Registered wineries and wine farms may continue to offer tasting of wines and sale of wine to the public for consumption off site.

**4. Controlled access to public entertainment areas (recreational/municipal parks and beaches)**

- (4.1) All beaches and recreational parks to close between **21 December 2020 to 08 January 2020**.
- (4.2) On the other dates, municipalities need to manage the numbers on the beaches and recreational parks to avoid overcrowding.
- (4.3) Shopping malls and other privately owned venues must define the maximum number of persons permitted to achieve social distancing. If the maximum number is exceeded the owner of the establishment will be liable to a fine.

**5. Publication of hotspots**

- (5.1) All municipalities must publish on their websites and local media, areas considered to be hotspots in their municipalities.

## Recommendations

The following considerations were made by the MAC on Covid-19:

### 1. Gatherings:

- The festive season generally starts from 16 December, and thus proposed that consideration that this period be defined as 16 December 2020 to 8 January 2021.
- (1.1) Maximum capacity will be an important consideration. It is proposed that point 1.1 be amended as follows: Restrictions on gatherings (including but not limited to religious and sporting events): maximum 50% of maximum capacity, to a maximum of 50 people indoors and 250 outdoors.
- One option for consideration is that larger gatherings (ie. >50 indoors or >250 outdoors) can apply for local government approval and thereby be registered with the police services for appropriate management.

### 2. Movement of persons

- (2.2) It was proposed that emphasis on NPIs in restaurants/bars/shebeens particularly social distancing and masks (nose and mouth) for staff and clients will be important. Consideration should be given to limiting the number of people in restaurants/bars/shebeens to 50% of their capacity.

### 3. Alcohol sales and consumption

- Need to emphasize that sale rules apply to shebeens (Eastern Cape previously made an agreement for off site sale of alcohol by shebeens on weekends which is causing problems). Proposed to include as point 3.5

### 4. Controlled access to public entertainment areas

Three different views were expressed by MAC members, with no consensus for (4.1). It was suggested that the current 4.1 be considered to be replaced by one of following options, noting that there is no right or wrong view, just a matter of perspective:

1. **Close all beaches for duration of the holiday period starting from the date of the anticipated first mass beach attendance to last mass beach attendance (e.g. 16 December to 3 January).**

#### Rationale:

- The scientific rationale for keeping indoor and outdoor mass gatherings small to reduce risk of transmission applies to beaches too. However, it is difficult to control the numbers expected, particularly at certain beaches, which could lead to overcrowding and increase risk of transmission.
- It will be almost impossible to cap the beach attendance at 250 (as for outdoor gatherings). If over-crowding in the tens of thousands of people is allowed on the beach, the clear consistent message on mass gatherings may be lost.
- It is expected that mask wearing and social distancing will not take place, because this is difficult to do on the beach and will be hard to enforce.
- We are now in the second wave with cases doubling by the day. As a result, there is a high likelihood that there will be infected individuals within the crowd. Spending long period in the midst of infectious individuals under crowded conditions with no masks, even if it is in the open, carries a high risk warranting drastic measures.
- Hospitals in areas of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal are already quite full, and there will not be capacity to manage extra burden of more potential patients.

2. **Close beaches only on certain dates where large crowds are anticipated (16, 24, 25, 26, 31 December 2020, 1 January 2021) with or without the additional option to open the beaches for a few hours only (eg. From 4am to noon) on the remaining days from 16 December to 3 January.**

Rationale:

- It is expected that particular days around Christmas and New Year's. As seen in previous years, overcrowding at the beaches on these days can be expected.
- On these days, many people are bused and taxied to beach areas which could contribute to SARS-CoV-2 spread.
- Instead of closing beaches for the entire holiday period, a compromise of only closing on those expected days could be made.
- Closing the beaches completely may lose the public's support. Focusing on targeted days may reduce this problem.

**3. Since beach over-crowding over the holidays may not be a problem at every beach, to allow Municipalities to decide and manage specific beach closures (place and dates) as necessary.**

Rationale:

- A one-size fits all approach may be inappropriate as some beaches may not have an over-crowding problem. Hence, each municipality should undertake an assessment of the risk and make decisions on each beach.
- Public support will be lost with the closing of all beaches.
- The scientific rationale applied to indoor and outdoor mass gatherings may not be directly applicable to beaches and parks. Outdoor activities with masking and social distancing should be allowed. Hence, beaches that can ensure beach attendance with social distancing and masks should be allowed to open. This could help reinforce the message that it is more important to ensure appropriate behavior through the use of NPIs.
- Will be important to reinforce the laws around the consumption of alcohol in public.
- Not all beaches are equal in terms of expected numbers. Certain beaches, e.g. Durban beachfronts, are expected to have overcrowding, however this may not be the case for all beaches and parks.
- Closing all beaches will have a negative impact on the economy, as those that have booked a holiday at the coast may no longer consider doing this.
- Generally, the closing of beaches may be hard to enforce particularly on specific days with large crowds.
- If beaches/park are closed, there may be increased crowding in other indoor areas such as malls.

- (4.2) Hard to enforce and manage.

**5. Publication of hotspots**

- No changes.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Kind regards,



**PROFESSOR SALIM S. ABDOOL KARIM**

**CO-CHAIRPERSONS: MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COVID-19**

**DATE: 11 December 2020**



**PROF MARIAN JACOBS**

**CC:**

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