



REMARKS BY ACTING MINISTER OF HEALTH MMAMOLOKO KUBAYI: MEDIA BRIEFING ON SA RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC 23 JULY 2021

- Good morning and welcome to everyone who has joined us for this press briefing
- The COVID-19 infection cases continue to fluctuate in waves and each wave leaves behind bereaved families and lost loved ones. Each day that this pandemic continues to spread and infect more people, it robs our country its greatest resource and that is its productive people.
- In the last 24 hours, there were 14 858 new cases, which is a decrease from that of the day before at 16 240 new cases. The number of new cases have been on a downward trend.
- We have also seen a significant drop in numbers in Gauteng which has been the epicentre of third wave. Although 4 988 new cases are still quite high, it is a significant drop from the provincial peak which went as high as over 16 000 new cases per day.
- The drop in numbers does not mean that we should lower our guard in the fight against this pandemic. Just because the numbers are coming down, does not mean the virus has stopped spreading. The Delta variant is spreading and it is still just as lethal. This means that our fight should rather intensify.
- In the midst of fighting this pandemic, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces got engulfed in social unrests that were very disruptive to our social lives, economic lives and to the health care service delivery system, especially in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.
- These social unrests have added to the complexity of our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the violent nature of the protests unsettled the health care as a whole in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.
- At the height of the unrests, there were disruptions in all areas of the health service delivery system.
- There was a decrease in the number of vaccinations due to the closure of vaccination sites.
- There was loss of vaccines due to looting. An estimated 120 private pharmacies were destroyed, which led to a loss of approximately 47 500 vaccine doses and lots of damage to infrastructure.
- Fortunately, a large majority of public vaccination sites were not damaged, which means they could immediately resume vaccinating and that is what has happened.

- Today, we have visited the province to engage with the provincial health department in order to better understand the extent of the disruption and to find ways to quickly restore normality to the system to the extent possible.
- In the Gauteng province, there was minimal disruption in the health care system. Vaccination numbers dropped slightly due to people fearing to go to certain vaccination sites that were close to the disruptive events.
- All indications are that we have passed the peak of the third wave and the overall number of cases have started to decline.
- However, we are extremely worried that the many gatherings that we saw during the unrests in the two provinces, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, might lead to another surge in numbers.
- We are watching this situation very closely.

Vaccination

- Our vaccination is gathering pace and we are thankful to South Africans who have responded positively to the calls to go out and vaccinate.
- The number of vaccinated people has just surpassed 6 million and we are currently vaccinating at a rate of more than 250 000 per day. Though yesterday the number of vaccinations dropped, we still believe that we will reach our goal of vaccinating at more than 300 000 people per day in the coming week.
- The milestones we have achieved in the vaccination programme are as a result of a very productive and coordinated working relationship between government and the private sector.
- The private sector through the Business for South Africa platform is working very closely with government to bring vaccine to the people.
- Through this collaboration, we have also been able to bring into the vaccination programme 1500 volunteers, who include doctors, nurses and health workers to help us to vaccinate on weekends on various sites across all nine provinces.
- Mr Martin Kingston from Business for South Africa, will elaborate on the partnership with the private sector and their role in the vaccination programme.
- We are putting additional systems in place to ensure that we vaccinate at an even faster rate.
- We have agreed with the Solidarity Fund that there should be Mass Vaccination Sites in all metros across the country. This is to cater for the large population densities that are found in metropolitan municipalities.
- The first model will be roving vaccination sites, which will move from one community to the next based on the demand.
- The Director-General of the National Department of Health, Dr Sandile Buthelezi, will provide more details on how these mass vaccination sites will be structured and operated.

- As we continue to vaccinate, we are making every effort to streamline the administrative process so that there is ease of use of the IT system, the EVDS, and the access to physical vaccination sites.
- One of the things that we've been getting complaints about is the automated scheduling process which at times was allocating people to sites to which it is costly for them to access or in places they don't know about.
- In this regard we are happy to announce that we have changed or reprogrammed the system to allow for self-scheduling. This means that anyone who is registered can choose a vaccination site where he/she wants to be vaccinated.
- To ensure that we reach all South Africans we are working on ensuring that the registration web portal or website uses all eleven official languages for ease of access. So far Isizulu, IsiXhosa, Sesotho and Afrikaans have gone live and we are still working on others.
- Ms Milani Wolmarans has joined us to give more details on these changes.
- The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Vaccine has agreed with our proposition to do away with sectoral prioritisation in our approach to vaccination. The age based strategy will be our approach going forward, it is more effective and helps us to reach a wider spectrum of South Africans.
- The vaccination of the over 35s has been going very well. We encourage more people within this age group to go out and vaccinate.
- Vaccines, just like any other medication, has side effects. Different individuals will experience these side effects differently, some less severe, some more severe and there are those who say they did not experience any effects.
- However, we are concerned that there is a growing spread of fake news and false narratives about the side effects of vaccines. These stories are aimed at creating a panic around the vaccination programme and discourage people from vaccinating.
- We have said before, and I will repeat this here again, we all have a freedom of choice. It is everyone's democratic right to choose not to vaccinate and government will not force anyone who chooses not to vaccinate to do so against their will.
- We appeal to those who have made the choice not to vaccinate to respect the right of others to make a choice by not flooding them with false information, fake news and other falsehoods aimed at discouraging them from vaccinating.
- We are joined today by Professor Glenda Gray who is the CEO of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) who is one of our top researchers on this subject.
- Professor Grey will provide some details about the side effects of vaccines and what people can expect after taking the vaccine

- I cannot thank healthcare workers, doctors, Nurses and all other supporting staff in health care centres enough for continuing to be in the forefront of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, even in circumstances where your lives were in danger.
- Stood up bravely and you continued to deliver services to South Africans at a time when many of us would have rushed to attend to the safety of our own friends and families.
- I also want to thank South Africans who stood up to defend our democracy, economic infrastructure and other vulnerable South Africans. This is who we are as South Africans, in time of difficulties we stand together united in our diversity and defend our country.
- In the same way that we must continue to work together as South Africans to in the fight against the pandemic.
- Let me thank all those who have been complying with the regulations that are aimed at containing the spread of the virus.