



health

Department: Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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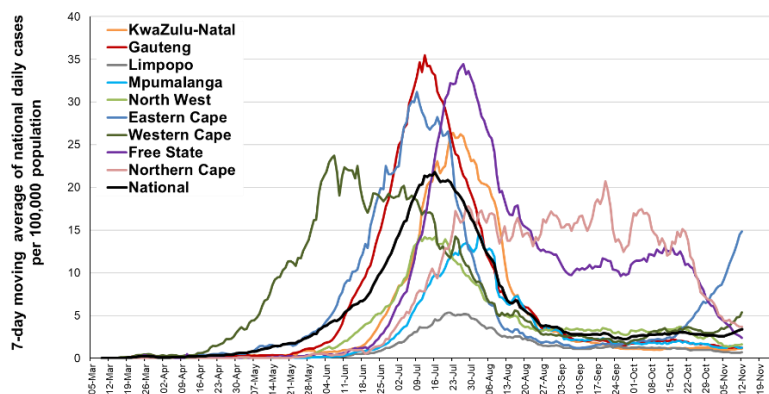
INTERNAL MEMO

Date:	22 November 2020		
To:	The Honorable Dr ZL Mkhize, Minister of Health	From:	Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on COVID-19

RESURGENCE OF SARS-COV-2 CASES IN THE EASTERN CAPE

Statement of the problem

1. The Eastern Cape province has had an increase in SARS-CoV-2 cases over the last few weeks with the current rate exceeding 10 cases per 100,000 population, a positive PCR test proportion above 20%, an increase in hospital admissions to levels comparable to the peak of the first wave and an increase in deaths – both reported Covid-19 deaths and excess deaths.



2. As at mid-November, the epidemic has largely been circumscribed and limited to Nelson Mandela Bay (NMB) and Sarah Baartman.
3. The level 1 restrictions are being widely flouted, especially by alcohol-selling establishments and high levels of complacency regarding social distancing and masks are evident
4. Potential for amplification of spread is particularly present in the long queues at Home Affairs and the Post Office (mostly for the R350 grant)
5. The public health services in this province that were struggling to cope before Covid-19, are now under significant strain as they are trying to cope with the normal burden of illness, including the alcohol related illnesses, as well as Covid-19 at the same time.
6. A major concern is the human resource shortage in the public health care system. The existing staff shortages in the health system is being compounded by the number of staff being infected and labour union disputes.
7. The NHLS lab is under pressure in NMB, resulting in a steadily increasing turnaround time for PCR results.

8. The very limited public hospital ICU capacity in NMB has already been reached while private hospital ICU capacity, which is much more substantial than the public sector, is also close to full. A particular concern is that most of the public hospitals, other than the 2 main hospitals, are not able to provide high flow oxygen to patients as they use portable oxygen tanks for their supply.
9. The Provincial authorities are implementing the provincial resurgence plan that has a “whole of government” and “whole of society” approach, and are drawing upon several other non-governmental organisations for assistance.

Recommendations

1. The full list of recommendations may be found in the accompanying EC Resurgence MAC Advisory_Appendix. The interventions outlined below are urgent and should be implemented as matter of priority.
2. Implement steps to curb the spread of the virus and cope with the clinical care needs in the health facilities at the same time. The situation requires support for the health services to cope with the flow of Covid-19 patients requiring care AND reducing the number of new infections to decrease pressure on the health services
3. Increase human resources, especially doctors, nurses, and support staff for the hospitals and laboratory staff at the NHLS laboratories.
4. Increase infection prevention and control measures and training in health facilities to reduce the number of infections among HCWs and the likelihood of healthcare-associated super spreading events.
5. HCWs to receive psychological support and rapid testing
6. Increase clinical interventions at for at high-risk patients, including rapid testing, oxygen saturation monitoring and increased oxygen bed capacity in the field hospital and for high flow nasal cannula oxygen support in the hospitals in Sarah Baartman.
7. Increase public health intervention capacity (testing, isolation, contact quarantine), communication with the public, and enforcement of level 1 restrictions
8. Consider imposing additional restrictions if enforcement of current restrictions are not containing viral transmission – a) extending the curfew hours, b) temporarily closing all institutions with indoor gatherings such as bars, restaurants, shebeens and nightclubs; and reducing the number attending funerals or religious activities to 50 people, and c) restriction of alcohol sales to reduce the burden of trauma-related admissions to the hospitals.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Kind regards,



PROFESSOR SALIM S. ABDOOL KARIM



PROF MARIAN JACOBS

CO-CHAIRPERSONS: MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COVID-19

DATE: 22 November 2020

CC:

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