Extension on Covid-19 regulation public comments

Health Minister, Dr Joe Phaahla, has announced a three-month extension for public comments on health regulations relating to the management of Covid-19.

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The comments relate to the Surveillance and Control of Notifiable Medical Conditions; Public Measures in Points of Entry; Management of Human Remains and Environmental Health by three months.

The extension was with effect from 5 May 2022. The new closing date for submission of comments is 5 July 2022.

In a statement, the department said the extension was in line with statutory requirements and would afford the department sufficient time to go through and consider all comments and representations on the regulations.

“All members of the public who submitted comments in the initial public consultation process do not need to resubmit these comments as all comments already submitted will be considered as part of this process.

“In order to ensure that there is no gap in terms of legal instruments to contain the spread of Covid-19 and future notifiable medical conditions, the department has gazetted the limited regulations for implementation with effect from Thursday, 5 May 2022,” reads the statement.

Regulations

These regulations mainly focus on wearing of face masks, gatherings and persons entering the country.

With regards to the wearing of face masks, the department said a person must, when entering and being inside an indoor public place, wear a face mask.

“This does not apply to children at school. Again, under these limited regulations, no person may use any form of public transport unless wearing a face mask.

“Gatherings are more clearly defined as planned assembly or meeting at a particular venue involving more than one hundred persons.

“For any indoor and outdoor gatherings, a maximum of 50% of the venue capacity may be occupied provided that every attendee must be vaccinated against Covid-19 and produce a valid vaccination certificate. Alternatively, attendees must produce a valid negative Covid-19 test result not older than 72 hours prior to the date of the gathering,” said the department.

If complying with this indoor gathering requirement is not possible, then attendance shall be limited to 1,000 people or 50% of the capacity, whichever is smaller, while the attendance at an outdoor gathering shall be limited to 2,000 people or 50% of the capacity, whichever is smaller.

Travellers

All international travellers arriving at South African Ports of Entry must be vaccinated against Covid-19 and produce a valid vaccination certificate; or produce a valid negative PCR Covid-19 test result not older than 72 hours before the date of departure.

Alternatively, said the department, “travellers have another option of producing a valid negative antigen Covid-19 test result performed by a medical practitioner, registered public health authority or accredited/approved laboratory obtained not older than 48 hours before the date of departure”.

“In a case where an international traveller is unable to produce a vaccination certificate or a negative PCR test result older than 72 hours or a negative antigen test result obtained at least 48 hours prior departure, then he/she must undergo antigen testing at the Port of Entry.

“If the person tests positive for Covid-19 in the antigen test, the traveller will still be admitted into the country but, if the traveller is experiencing symptoms of Covid19, they must self-isolate for a period of ten days after admission into South Africa.”

However, reads the statement, the vaccination or testing requirement was not applicable to travellers who are under the age of 12 years and daily commuters from neighbouring countries.

It is important to emphasise that the proposed amendments to the health regulations do not amend the National Health Act, 2003, but rather augment certain existing regulations.

The department would like to remind people that, despite the current process to source public comments on the health regulations, there is still an imperative to provide options to manage the Covid-19 pandemic and other notifiable medical conditions without invoking the state of national disaster.

Therefore, members of the public are reminded that Covid-19 remains a life-threatening disease, and the country is not yet out of the woods.

"The only way we can protect ourselves and our loved ones against this pandemic and the current rising number of positive cases, is through vaccination and adhering to preventative measures at all times," the department said.

Fully vaccinated people are urged to consider booster shots to increase their immunity.

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