

Health focuses on immunity, seroprevalence as Covid-19 cases decline

Health Minister, Dr Zweli Mkhize, says the department is currently conducting a national seroprevalence study to determine the levels of national immunity.



Health Minister, Dr Zweli Mkhize

“South Africa has seen the surge receding and thus raises the question of the level of immunity that may already be existing in society,” Mkhize said in a statement.

According to the model of Covid-19, the initial seroprevalence studies from convenience samples have shown levels between 29% and 40%.

“Interestingly, the revised models currently predict that there are probably about 12-million South Africans in total - detected and undetected - infected with Covid-19. This translates to about 20% of the population,” said Mkhize.

There are now 650,749 confirmed Covid-19 cases, with 15,499 deaths since the outbreak in March 2020, after 52 more people lost their lives on Monday.

However, Mkhize said the number of detected cases countrywide continues to be on a downward spiral since 22 August 2020, when the country reported under 3,000 cases.

This was down from between 10,000 and 15,000 cases a day at the peak of the pandemic in July.

Patients under investigation, general ward admissions, ICU admissions, deaths and excess deaths are on the decline, the department said.

“Consistency across these indicators reassures us that indeed, we are in the midst of a trough in the pandemic.”

The latest report released by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) also indicated that the discharge rate from the hospital was 75%, while the in-hospital case fatality ratio was 17.5%.

“At the height of the epidemic, these sample hospitals were reporting between 6 400 and 6 8 00 admissions per week,” said Mkhize.

Critical needs demands drop

South Africa has benefited significantly from the contributions of the World Health Organisation (WHO) surge team.

The WHO surge team’s situational report confirms the decline as reported by NICD.

The report showed a 42% decline of detected cases in the preceding two weeks and a 28.9% decline in deaths in the same period.

“Admission to critical care wards increased by 13.9% during this epidemic week but conversely, admissions into general wards decreased by 43% in the same period,” the department said.

Bed occupancy and oxygen demand are also falling.

Mkhize said the percentage of beds currently occupied by Covid-19 patients nationally is under 10% for non-ICU beds and under 30% for ICU beds.

The department has also increased the acquisition of ventilators, with 5,444 procured (some having been received through donations).

Mkhize said 2,848 ventilators are currently awaiting delivery.

Meanwhile, 20,000 ventilators are still expected to be produced through the National Ventilator Project.

“We also have reports from Afrox indicating that oxygen demand has decreased nationally in the past few weeks,” said the minister.

Healthcare workers

Mkhize said his department is determined to protect frontline workers, who remain of paramount importance. “We reiterate: no personal protective equipment (PPE), no work!”

As of 11 September, 32,429 healthcare workers had contracted the coronavirus, while 257 succumbed to the deadly virus.

KwaZulu-Natal has the highest number of deaths at 69, followed by the Eastern Cape with 66, Gauteng 37 and Free State 23.

The minister said he was pleased that Occupational Health and Safety Committees (OHS) are now established in 3,849 public health facilities, where union members will also be represented. “This will assist in constant monitoring of issues

affecting health workers, including where there is a shortage of PPE."

Auditor-general report

The minister noted with concern the findings of the auditor-general (AG), which cast the spotlight on the deficiencies and non-compliance with PPE procurement processes, insufficient controls to ensure receipt and payments of PPE, and the level of quality of PPE.

The AG also highlighted the delays in the delivery of the protective gear, as well as evidence of price gouging and failure to procure them at market value.

"This cannot be accepted. This must be condemned. Once all the investigations have been concluded, there must be consequence management for any officials that may be implicated in wrongdoing and/or irregularity," Mkhize said.

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