

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION STATEMENT
ON PLANS FOR THE POST SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
INSTITUTIONS ON THE ADJUSTED LEVEL 4 LOCKDOWN WITH EFFECT FROM
MONDAY 28 JUNE 2021

30 June 2021

Programme Director;
Deputy Minister Buti Manamela;
Director General Mjwara;
My Advisors and Ministry Staff;
Senior Management of both my Departments;
All DSI and DHET entities;
Vice Chancellors and Universities Management
SAPCO leadership;
Student leadership, both SAUS and SATVETSA
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen

Good Afternoon

Our public statement today will be on:

1. Our ongoing work within the science and innovation, as coordinated through the Department of Science and Innovation, and
2. Our plans for the Adjusted level 4 lockdown within the Post School Education and Training Sector.

ON SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

Let me once-more take this opportunity to reiterate our gratitude to the announcement by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, that South Africa will become the first COVID-19 mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub.

WHO is seeking to expand the capacity of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to produce COVID-19 vaccines and scale up manufacturing to increase global access to these critical tools to bring the pandemic under control.

President Macron from France visited South Africa on 28 and 29 May 2021. During his visit he made the announcement that France will support South Africa and Africa with regards to the local manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines. This will be by establishing the mRNA Technology Transfer Hub.

The establishment of this hub will ensure that South Africa local manufacturing capabilities of vaccines will be enhanced. This means that South Africa will move

beyond just fill/finishing of vaccines, into the manufacturing of the active component or drug substance of vaccine.

South Africa local manufacturing will be ready to move into commercial scale manufacturing of the drug substance, with relevant equipment, facility preparation, staff training, and doing validation runs.

As a country we will be able to move into full-scale development and innovation of our product even beyond COVID-19.

Developments around the DELTA variant

In response to the increasing spread of the Delta variant around the world, the Network for Genomic Surveillance in South Africa (NGS-SA) has been monitoring and sequencing confirmed COVID-19 cases in the country. This Covid 19 genome surveillance work is funded by our DSI and is based at the University of KwaZulu Natal, at an entity known as KwaZulu Natal Research and Innovation Sequencing Platform (KRISP).

On 25 June 2021, the Network for Genomic Surveillance in South Africa confirmed from the latest representative community sampling (up to 17 June 2021) that the Delta variant increased significantly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal and is now the most common variant detected in that province.

These Delta genomes were sampled from multiple locations across six districts of KwaZulu-Natal, Harry Gwala (n=16), Zululand (n=15), iLembe (n=14), eTheweni (n=12), King Cetshwayo (n=1) and Ugu (n=1).

This demonstrates a striking increase across the province and suggests that the Delta variant is rapidly displacing the Beta variant (501Y.V2/B.1.351), that had been dominant since the onset of the second wave.

The first detection of the Delta variant in South Africa was from a sample collected on the 24 April 2021.

The Delta variant had as per reporting at the time detected in Gauteng, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape.

Although initial sequences were from cases with recent travel history, there is now clear evidence of community transmission of the Delta variant in South Africa.

In Gauteng, the Delta variant was detected in 1/129 (1%) of samples in April and 13/184 (7%) in May 2021.

The data for sequences up to 21 June 2021 indicated that almost 75% of the cases in Gauteng were exposed to the Delta variant, with an increase of the Delta variant in the Western Cape and with signs of dominance starting to show in Limpopo and starting to replace the dominance of the Beta variant in all the provinces.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform (KRISP), the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS), and the University of Cape Town (UCT) who sequenced these recently confirmed cases of the DELTA variant in South Africa.

My gratitude also goes to the NGS-SA - a consortium of scientists funded by the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and the South Africa Medical Research Council (SAMRC).

As we may know by now that the Delta variant was firstly detected in India but is now present in over 100 countries and is rapidly becoming the dominant variant in many locations.

It is designated as a variant of concern (VOC) by the World Health Organization (WHO), on the basis of evidence of increased transmissibility and immune evasion.

Although laboratory studies suggest that this variant is able to evade parts of the immune response (from natural infection or vaccination), this is no more than the Beta variant.

Furthermore, evidence from the United Kingdom shows that vaccines remain effective as long as the full vaccination schedule is received.

I would therefore like to join the President and all the NCCC Ministers in calling for the observance of all the health and safety protocols.

We must always wear a mask in public.

We must regularly wash or sanitise our hands.

We must always keep a safe distance from others. Unless it is necessary, please remain at home.

If you are sick and have even mild COVID-19 symptoms, you must isolate yourself, including from your immediate household.

ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

As you may recall, on 29 March 2021 I released directions in the Government Gazette (number 44342) to provide a national framework for guiding public and private HEIs in managing the 2021 academic year during the continued COVID-19 pandemic.

These directions were shared with all public and private institutions and have provided an important basis for discussions on how institutions should manage the 2021 academic year in the face of the many challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, its effect on operations, teaching and learning and research activities, and with the aim of ensuring the protection of staff and students across the sector.

The following directions should be read with the relevant COGTA regulations released from time to time (the latest of which were published in the Government Gazette number 44772, on 27 June 2021) following the President's announcement.

The President of the Republic of South Africa, his Excellency, Cyril Ramaphosa publicly announced on the 27th June 2021 that the country will go into an adjusted Level 4 Lockdown from Monday, 28th June 2021 for a period of 2 weeks.

The President announced that All gatherings or meetings are prohibited and that schools and other institutions will be closed for at least two weeks; and contact classes in tertiary institutions will be closed this week, with access to buildings closed. Residences, however, will remain open.

Following these restrictions and measures, I requested Deputy Minister Bhuti Manamela to urgently convene our Ministerial Task COVID-19 Post-School Education and Training (PSET) Task Team, comprising Usaf, SAPCO, Labour Unions, SATVETSA and SAUS to discuss and provide inputs on an optimal plan to manage institutional mandates under the new restrictions.

On the basis of these consultations and inputs from the Department of Higher Education and Training, I would like to announce the following measures applicable to the PSET sector during the current phase of national lockdown restrictions:

UNIVERSITIES

The principle outlined in the higher education sector directions is that all our universities will manage their own academic activities in line with the national directions and health protocols, with the support of Higher Health.

Institutions are expected to ensure their COVID-19 Task Teams are functional and active during this period to manage institutional responses to the pandemic and maintain effective communication and consultation with staff and students.

The new directions provide guidance on the following matters: institutional plans; campus health and safety; student accommodation and residences; psychosocial assistance for staff and students; academic classes and examinations; graduations ceremonies and events; international students and international travel and vaccination.

In terms of the Adjusted Level 4 Lockdown that has now been put in place, our universities do not officially close, but all face-to-face teaching and examinations must halt for the next two-week period. Learning will shift exclusively to online learning for all students.

Residences will remain open, as it is also not safe for students to travel back home at this time and it is necessary for students to retain access to campus and residence-based wifi.

However, universities need to continue to manage residences according to the necessary health and safety protocols, as outlined in the directions and in line with protocols developed by Higher Health.

Under no circumstances should any mass social or other activities be permitted in residences or on campuses during this period and institutions are requested to strictly enforce restrictive measures.

It has also been agreed that international and inter-provincial travel will be discouraged, and limited to essential services and needs.

There will be controlled access to campuses for essential services and other activities that cannot be suspended at this time.

As many staff as possible who can do so, should work from home.

The sector will continue to be guided by the 29 March 2021 directions and the 27 June COGTA regulations.

TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL AND EDUCATION TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

Until all colleges are officially closed this week and upon re-opening after the lockdown period all social distance, health and safety protocols will be strictly adhered to at all campuses (including residences which will remain open). This includes, but is not limited to sanitization, social distancing, wearing of masks, contact tracing and phased-in contact classes as guided by the Ministerial Advisory Committee and other relevant parties.

Colleges will initiate hybrid (remote) teaching and learning approaches as was done in 2020, further details of this and amended opening dates for our colleges will be communicated by colleges in detail in due course.

The DHET working together with SACPO is in the process of finalising negotiations with the relevant mobile network operators (MNOs) for the zero-rated data for both students and staff. Colleges will be making alternative plans to ensure that students receive their learning content whilst the issue of data is being addressed.

The TVET college examinations calendar will be adjusted to ensure that students are adequately prepared for examinations and assessments and are not disadvantaged in any way. I must indicate that flexibility exists in our TVET examinations calendar to allow for any reasonable amendment.

Semester 1 and NCV students who are currently in recess shall resume their classes on 12 July on a rotational basis.

Semester 2 registrations are ongoing and phased-in classes to begin on 01 August 2021 subject to review.

Staff attendance at colleges and regional offices should be at a maximum of 33% to allow for limited disruption.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The Community colleges will be guided by the Department of Basic Education calendar because majority of our colleges uses the basic education infrastructure.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Lockdown level 4 with its stringent measures will negatively impact on a number of economic sectors supported by the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA), including skill training programmes in the Hospitality and Tourism sector.

As a result, the free flow of skills training in the workplace-based programmes (learnerships, internships and apprenticeship) will be slowed down.

To mitigate against the slowdown in economic gain and skills training, previous interventions such as the skills levy holiday on employers and the accelerated increase on the apprenticeship grant will apply in the immediate affected period.

In order to assist skills development providers to continue and manage service delivery under lockdown level 4, the Criteria and Guidelines for the Gradual Opening of Activities within the OQSF as per Regulations of the Disaster Management Act, published on the 29 June 2020 serve as a framework guiding document, which they must apply.

Provisions are made with respect to measures that need to be implemented during lockdowns which include but not limited to Lock down Permits, Administration, Sanitizing, Disinfection, Deep Cleaning, Social Distancing, Health and Safety, Ventilation, PPE, Remote Multi Modal Teaching and Learning and Remote Working.

These provisions also apply to all Trade Test Centres.

Due to the severity and rapid spread of the current and dominant DELTA strain, all skills development providers are urged also to consider reducing physical trainer/assessor/ candidate interactions within training or testing spaces.

UPDATE ON NSFAS LAPTOP DISTRIBUTION

NSFAS has to date, ordered 170,000 laptops from the appointed service provider. Of this, a total of 90,060 has arrived in the country and is ready for distribution. The balance will be arriving in the country mid-July 2021 and mid-September 2021.

To date, University student information as per the NSFAS portal has been slow due to universities not timeously verifying student details on the NSFAS portal.

A total of 1,846 students' information has been shared with the provider of which 1,123 has been delivered to four (4) Universities namely, the University of Pretoria, University of Free State (UFS), Durban University of Technology (DUT) and the University of Mpumalanga (UM).

I call upon our universities to contact NSFAS through the NSFAS portal to ensure that they verify their students information. It is important that universities must prioritise this task urgently.

The TVET students do not order via the NSFAS portal, however NSFAS will prioritize the TVET students for delivery.

A total TVET listing of 46,846 has recently been shared with the provider for delivery. The provider will contact these students to arrange for delivery as campus is currently closed.

Of the 46,846 a total of 183 has been delivered to South Cape TVET college and 86 for Central JHB TVET.

MAINTAINING HEALTH AND SAFETY IN ALL OUR INSTITUTIONS

HIGHER HEALTH has trained and developed over 49 000 campus-based frontline institutional staff and student volunteers.

Among them are residence officers (on-campus, off-campus and private accommodation), management, student support services, campus security and cleaning staff.

During all the waves including the current third wave, we have experienced several cluster outbreaks, across many of our institutional residences, which has warranted HIGHER HEALTH to develop a specific protocol on residences to deal with COVID-19 positive cases.

We established isolation and quarantine resources within the residences to prevent further outbreaks in common areas, such as dining halls, kitchen and study halls.

Going forward, we will accelerate daily COVID-19 screenings at residences in order to early identify possible outbreaks.

HIGHER HEALTH will now embark in partnership with all institutional managements towards training of resident managers, wardens, other resident staff, including private accommodation on the Resident Safety Protocol.

I urge all institutions to work with HIGHER HEALTH as residences poses a serious risk for COVID-19 outbreaks and ensuring we save lives among our students.

It is now evident that the new Delta variant, is highly transmissible and increasingly infecting larger numbers of younger persons in the population – unlike the previous (Alpha) variant. It is therefore crucial for young people to take these extra measures very seriously if we are to prevent community transmission.

Our scientists are unequivocal in the fact that social behaviour is still the biggest driver of this pandemic and wearing of masks, maintaining social distancing, regular washing and sanitizing of our hands have a direct, immediate and material impact on its transmissibility. Your social behavior can save many lives.

The HIGHER HEALTH tollfree digital screening tool, called HealthCheck which is available on USSD, WhatsApp and in a webform, provides a comprehensive symptom screening on a daily basis. It also issues a daily passport to enable all our students and staff to screen their COVID-19 status, thus allowing easy access in our campuses.

I urge all our students, staff and service providers to use HealthCheck before leaving your home or residence in order to look after yourself as well as protecting others.

Keeping in mind the new variants that are highly transmissible even when someone is asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic and especially in the third wave, daily COVID-19 screening is critical towards saving human lives.

Thus far over 12.9 million passports have been issued through this tool since its launch in early June 2020.

In order to strengthen our student health and wellness services at campuses in underprivileged communities, HIGHER HEALTH established District Campus Health and Wellness Mobile Clinic Health Care Programme.

These clinics play a key role in various provinces in managing cluster outbreaks across our campuses. We work closely with Department of Health, National Health Laboratory Services to enable early detection, isolation and further mitigating the spread of infection, across our residences and campuses.

Vaccinations

I have instructed HIGHER HEALTH to come up with a PSET vaccination strategy that is aligned with and supporting the Department of Health's phased national vaccine roll out strategy.

The strategy will help to ensure access to vaccination for all our staff, including academia, management but importantly our frontline staff, at our residences, cleaning, security and other support staff.

This matter has been tabled at the IMC and I am confident that very soon we will start the roll out of vaccination to all our staff in the post school system.

I will be making an announcement as soon as the Department of Health is able to provide the vaccine allocations framework for our sector. For easy access of vaccinations to our staff and later students, work has already begun to develop vaccination centres within our Universities and TVET Colleges.

I am so proud that thus far many of our universities (CPUT, UP, UWC, NMU, Unizulu) have already become vaccination sites for the public, health science staff and students, pensioners.

Many of our TVET colleges are already serving as vaccination sites for Department of Basic Education's vaccination programme for its Educators. We are confident that we will very soon be able to vaccinate all our staff in the coming few weeks.

Thank you very much and let us all keep all the health and safety protocols at all the material times.

I thank you.