

BUSINESS FOR SA

SA 'can conduct 25,000 Covid-19 tests a day'

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SA was able to conduct 25,000 Covid-19 tests a day, enough to meet the demand expected to be generated by the government's community screening programme, Business for SA (B4SA) said on Tuesday.

B4SA is an alliance of organisations across the business spectrum working with the government to tackle Covid-19 in SA. The government has deployed more than 10,000 field workers to screen and refer patients for testing for the highly contagious Sars-Cov-2 coronavirus as part of its strategy for trying to slow community transmission of disease.

The illness has swept around the globe in less than four months, infecting more than 1.94-million people and killing nearly 20,000, according to the Johns Hopkins University tracker. By Tuesday, the number of confirmed cases in SA stood at 2,415 with 27 deaths.

Slightly more than 87,000 Covid-19 tests have been conducted in SA so far.

"Our sense is that the country is equipped from a capacity and test kit point of view to carry out 25,000 tests a day," said the head of B4SA's health-care workgroup, Stavros Nicolaou, who is also Aspen Pharmacare's executive for strategic trade.

The field work that is now under way is expected to give the government vital information on the extent of Covid-19's spread, as it considers how and when to ease the country's lockdown restrictions on trade and travel.

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Nicolaou reiterated the message from health minister Zweli Mkhize's top advisers on Monday night, saying that the lockdown measures had bought SA the time to prepare its health system, but could not protect it from an eventual surge in patient numbers.

"We are all aware this is not a short-term thing. All we are doing is deferring the spike," he said.

The head of the minister's 45-member advisory committee, Salim Abdool Karim, said on Monday night that by the end of this week the screening programme would indicate whether the current estimate of an average of 67 new infections a day was accurate.

From a purely public health perspective, the lockdown should only be eased when the average number of new daily infections falls below 44, he said.

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