

■ PANDEMIC

‘KZN in the midst of Covid-19 peak’

Rate of infections in the province nears 3 000 per day

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KWAZULU-NATAL is in the midst of its Covid-19 surge says epidemiologist and infectious diseases specialist, Professor Salim Abdool Karim.

Abdool Karim was speaking following a Covid-19 situational update by Health Minister Zweli Mkhize yesterday where he noted the province’s concerning trend.

While Gauteng, Eastern Cape and Western Cape may have reached their peak of Covid-19 infections, Mkhize said he was concerned about KZN, which could take off in “any direction”.

Mkhize said KZN was tracking two weeks behind Gauteng and taking a similar trend. Gauteng surpassed all provinces and peaked with a rate of just under 6000 infections per day in June.

In KZN, the numbers are very close to the 3000 mark per day with a slight decrease, said Mkhize.

He said it was difficult to say that the rate of infection was decreasing because the current rate was very close to the province’s peak of infections.

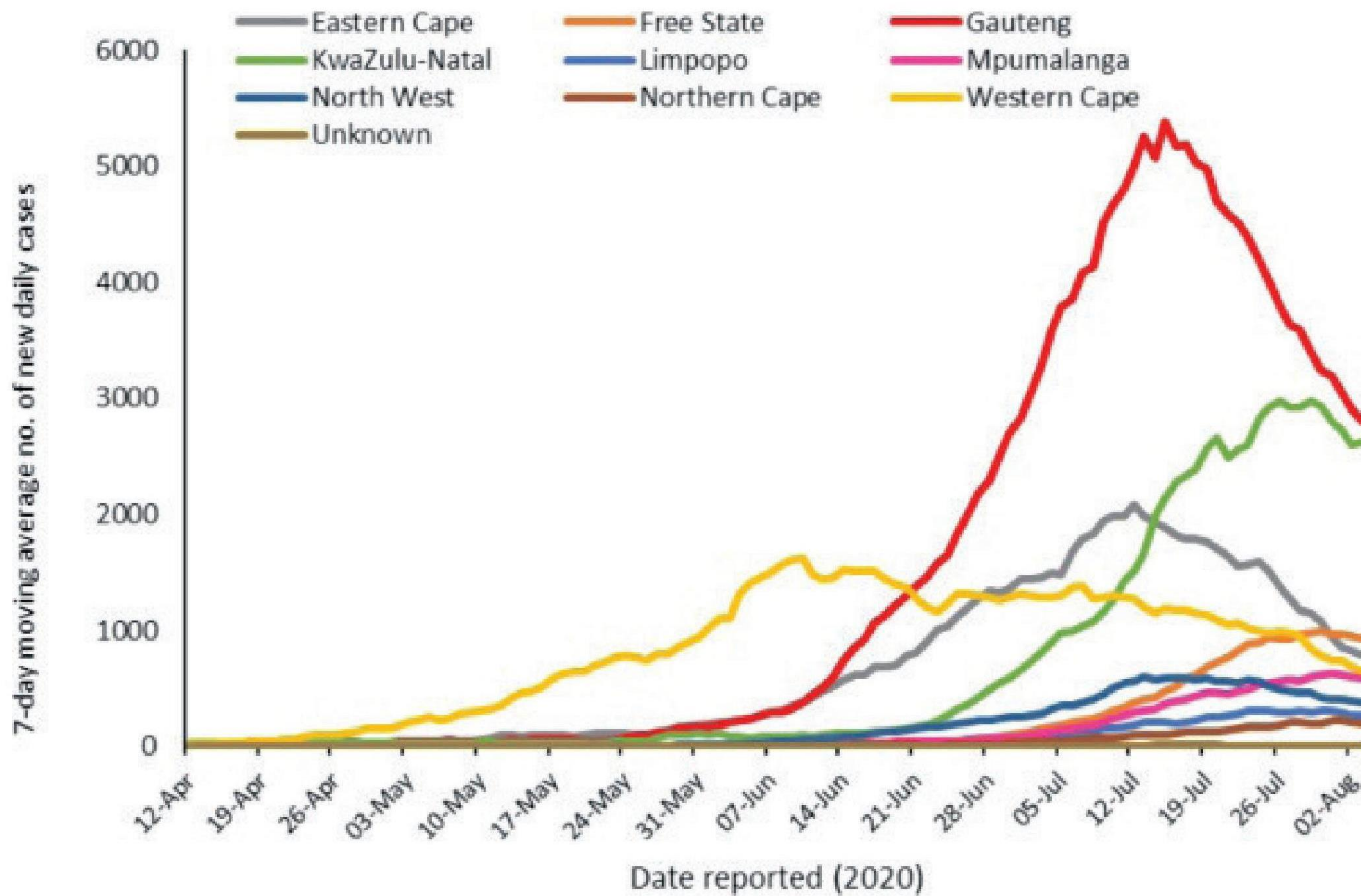
“We are concerned about this and we believe that this is the area where the real pressure of Covid is going to be felt whilst at the same time we are feeling the same pressure in Gauteng but it’s going to be even more stronger in KZN,” said Mkhize.

Abdool Karim said in terms of the overall epidemic in South Africa, provinces have varied in terms of when they started the rapid increase towards the peak.

It started first in the Western Cape, followed by the Eastern Cape and then Gauteng.

“At this stage we are seeing in the region of 3000 cases so there is no question that in this point in the epidemic, KZN is going to be the key influence of how our epidemic progresses because the numbers have been coming down in Gauteng and Western Cape but KZN was the only one where it was going up,” said Abdool Karim.

He further explained that while in the past few days the numbers had not been changing that much in KZN, he would not want to make any

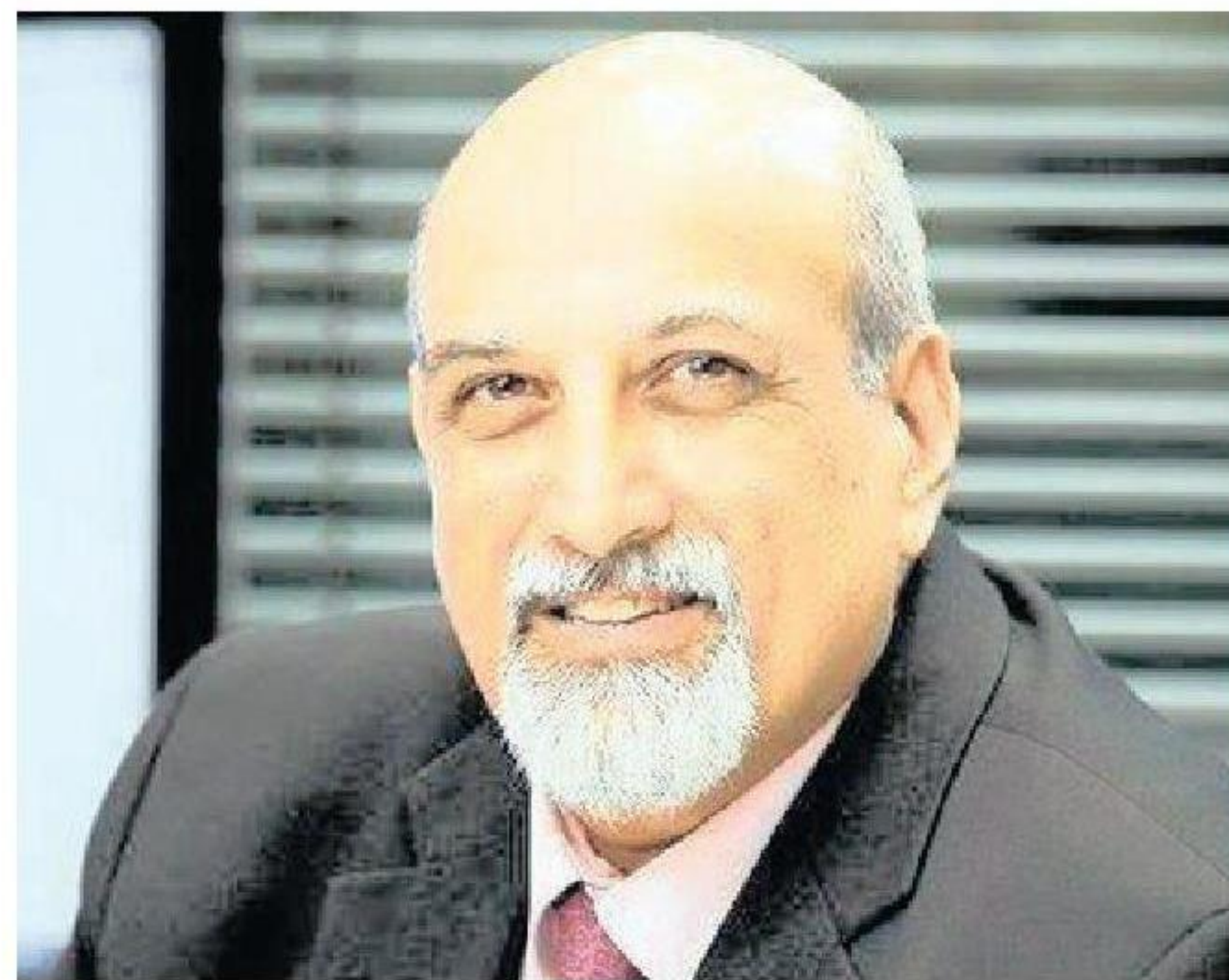


Graph: 7 Day Moving Average of New Cases

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



Dr Zweli Mkhize



Professor Salim Abdool Karim

conclusion based on that.

He said one of the issues was that KZN was one of the few places where there was a backlog in testing.

“Once that backlog is completed which I’m told will be this week, we’ll have a better idea of what the correct numbers are in KZN.”

Abdool Karim said that by early next week, “we would have some idea as to whether KZN was on a downward trend, upward trend or staying straight”.

“At this stage we are in a situation where KZN is in the midst of its surge.

“How long that surge will last we will know in the next few days once the backlog is completed and once we start looking at the number of admissions coming into hospitals,” he said.

To assess why the rate of infections had plateaued in some provinces, Mkhize said they had looked at key indicators.

These include a reduction in hospital admissions and people under

investigation in health facilities. Hospitals had not breached capacity and despite the surge there had not been a significant increase in deaths.

“Whilst we are cautiously optimistic, it is still too early for us to make definite conclusions regarding the observed decline.”

Mkhize said a continued tracking of all these indicators was needed to ensure the testing capacity reflected a realistic picture of the country’s epidemiological status.

“As part of improving the records of Covid-19 related deaths in response to reports on excess deaths, we now require that all the sudden deaths and those that occur at home must have specimens taken for Covid-19 before a death certificate is issued.”

The latest number of infected health workers in total was 24 104 – as of August 2 – with 181 fatalities recorded, Mkhize said.

The minister said the insufficient provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and failure or neglect by management to adhere to prescribed workplace safety protocols would not

WHO TEAM ARRIVES

THE first team of 43 senior experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) arrived in South Africa yesterday to assist in the fight against Covid-19.

Health Minister Zweli Mkhize announced that 17 experts from around the world were expected to arrive yesterday.

He said the team, which includes infectious disease epidemiologist and public health expert Dr David Heymann, would complete a period of quarantine and initiation before being deployed within the department and across various provinces.

“I’m also pleased that Dr Mike Ryan will be leading the team from Geneva and will now be focusing on South Africa and providing us with constant advice while analysing our strategies, including the decisions we have taken as the Department of Health in our Covid-19 response,” said Mkhize.

He acknowledged WHO director-general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus for his continuous support and counsel.

He said Tedros and his team had had to carry the global burden in the battle against Covid-19.

“We see this as a great opportunity, not only to improve our health strategies during this pandemic, but also to accelerate our path towards healthcare reform,” said Mkhize.

The arrival of the team of experts comes as South Africa ranks in the top five globally in terms of the number of infections. | KAREN SINGH

be tolerated.

Mkhize had requested that all provinces have Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Committees which are fully formed and functional within a week.

“In these OHS meetings, staff and unions must ventilate all issues and if the resolution is not satisfactory, the complaints must be escalated to the relevant MECs.”

Mkhize added that if issues were still not resolved, unions would be able to bring their issues to his attention at a national level.