

When the fifth Covid-19 wave is expected to hit South Africa: expert

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South Africa is likely to see its next wave of Covid-19 infections within the coming months, says epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim.

Speaking to radio station Jacaranda, Karim said that based on previous waves South Africa is at the start of a three-month 'lull' during which it can ease restrictions and prepare for the next wave.

He added that it was impossible to tell what the next Covid wave will be or what the next Covid-19 variant could be – as it does not exist yet. He added that government has to be prepared to reinstitute new restrictions based on what that new variant will look like.

“We work on a rough basis that we will get a new wave every three months. The Omicron wave ended about two weeks ago so that means we now have about three months, and we can predict that we will likely see the fifth wave around the end of April or thereabouts.

“It will be driven by a new variant and it is unlikely that Omicron will be coming back again. The issue is that nobody can predict what the new variant will look like.”

Karim said that if South Africa had a higher level of vaccination – around 70% – it could further relax restrictions as there would be less of a risk of overwhelming hospitals. However, he noted that the country is only at a 30% (full) vaccination rate, and while past infections do confer some protection, it is not at the same level as being vaccinated.

If the country was highly vaccinated, the government could quite readily lift most remaining restrictions – with the exception of one or two restrictions such as mass indoor gatherings as well as indoor mask mandates, he said.

South Africa reported 1,094 new cases of Covid-19 on Monday (14 February), taking the total reported to 3,642,905.

Deaths have reached 97,250 (+257), while recoveries have climbed to 3,508,249, leaving the country with a balance of 37,406 active cases and a recovery rate of 96,3%. A total of 30,559,431 vaccines have been administered.