

Covid-19 fifth wave likely expected in early May, warns Professor Abdool Karim

The infectious diseases epidemiologist says the fifth wave is dependent on a new variant.

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South African scientist and epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim. Picture: Rajesh Jantilal/ AFP

Prominent public health specialist, epidemiologist and infectious diseases specialist, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, on Tuesday warned that the fifth wave of Covid-19 infections was likely expected in South Africa in early May.

Covid-19 fifth wave

However, Abdool Karim said this was largely dependent on the emergence of a new coronavirus variant in the country.

“If the past trends continue, we can expect that we will see a fifth wave sometime in early May. But that’s always dependent on whether there is a new variant,” he said in an interview with [Radio 702](#).

Abdool Karim, who chaired the ministerial advisory committee (MAC) on Covid-19, welcomed government’s decision on Monday to lift the [national state of disaster](#) after more than two years of lockdown restrictions.

ALSO READ: [State of disaster finally over, but these rules remain](#)

But he warned that South Africans should not let their guards down, and should continue to observe non-pharmaceutical interventions, because the pandemic was not yet over.

“Given that we are now in a situation where the epidemic has reached a point of low transmission, it’s a good time to ease the restrictions. I think we need to just remember that we’re still living in the midst of a pandemic, don’t forget that,” Abdool Karim said.

“I’m of the opinion that we can never let our guard down. Those who do will pay the price, we have to remain vigilant,” he added.

New variants

Since the fourth wave in December last year that was driven by the [Omicron variant](#), there had not been any new variants detected in South Africa, Abdool Karim said.

“There are some early indications, for example, BA.4 is now increasing in South Africa [and] Deltacron is increasing in some countries. But a clear cut new variant has not been reported yet,” he said.

He said amid growing concerns over the resurgence in Covid-19 infections in [China](#), where the virus was first identified, South Africans had nothing to worry about because China’s cases were not being driven by a new variant.

Abdool Karim said once a variant had already caused a wave of new infections, like what happened in South Africa with Omicron, it was likely that most people had developed immunity to that same variant.

This could either be due to previous natural infection or from vaccination, hence the importance of getting inoculated against Covid-19.

“But as it stands, China is really being tormented by Omicron. That’s the same variant that we have already been through in December [2021] and January [2022].

“So, we are not concerned about Omicron anymore, we already had that wave.”

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Abdool Karim said because the surge in new infections in China was due to Omicron, it was unlikely that the variant would drive the fifth wave of infections in South Africa.

“So it’s unlikely that the next wave will be caused by a past variant because we have immunity to the past variant. It has to be some new kind of variant that hasn’t emerged yet.”

Abdool Karim outlined the four measures he believes would slow SA’s infection rate and reduce the likelihood of a new variant being detected.

“We need to make sure that we continue testing as much as possible so that when a new variant comes along, we test for it and we know it exists and we can monitor it.

“The second is that we’ve got to ensure that we continue our indoor mask-wearing as well as keep some control on mass gatherings. The fourth is that we’ve got to require vaccination for indoor activities.”