

NEWS

Your Covid-19 questions answered

Should public health measures be scrapped now that the fifth wave has passed?

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The public has until July 5 to comment on the proposed Covid-19 regulations. File photo.
Image: 123rf/ kellyermis

Government's decision to not lift all health restrictions has been a hot topic, with many calling for the Covid-19 measures to be abolished.

Last month the health department extended the deadline for public comment on the proposed Covid-19 regulations by three months.

Health minister Joe Phaahla said the extension to July 5 is in line with statutory requirements and will afford the department sufficient time to consider all comments and representations on the regulations.

He said: "Despite the current process to source public comments on the health regulations there is still an imperative to provide options to manage the Covid-19 pandemic and other notifiable medical conditions without invoking the state of national disaster".

Phaahla said Covid-19 remains a life-threatening disease, and the country is not yet out of the woods.

Has SA passed the fifth wave?

SA passed the peak of the fifth wave last month, with data showing infections have peaked and are on the decline.

According to senior researcher at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Dr Ridhwaan Suliman, there has been a slowdown in new infections.

Speaking on eNCA, Suliman said: "We are well past the peak of the fifth wave of Covid-19 infections in SA.

"We can confirm the number of confirmed cases is on a decline. Furthermore, test positivity is also declining."

Should all public health measures be scrapped?

According to Caprisa director and epidemiologist Prof Salim Abdool Karim, there is no simple answer to this question.

"Some would say once measures like masks and social distancing are dropped, it would be difficult to toggle them back on when needed in the future," he said.

"Others argue prevention holidays increase adherence to public measures when they are needed. Regardless of which point of view is most applicable to a population at a given time, there are simple measures that could be considered during periods of low transmission to help people live smartly with the coronavirus – not going overboard with precautions or conceding defeat to the virus."

Phaahla said the department disagrees with those who want it to drop all regulations.

He said government gets no joy from inconveniencing citizens with restrictions.

"We say sorry where we have wronged you, but please be assured all interventions were meant and are still meant for all of us to avoid the severe impact of Covid-19.

"We completely disagree with armchair critics who argue we should drop all public health measures and let the virus spread at will, and only worry about whether hospitals are full," said Phaahla.

He reiterated the measures government took using the Disaster Management Act were not meant to control people but to protect SA against the harshest impacts of Covid-19.