

EDITORIAL

VACCINE DEBATE IS NOT OVER YET

AS THE country on Saturday marked 730 days, or two years, since the government imposed the first Covid-19 lockdown, and amid concerns over a fifth wave of infections, the issue of mandatory vaccinations has once again entered the public discourse.

The aim of the lockdown was to flatten the curve and allow the country's health-care system to prepare itself to deal with the rapidly rising cases. Initially, front-line workers and the health-care system were overwhelmed by the number of cases.

This was a global phenomenon as Covid-19 had thrown up many firsts in terms of response, medical infrastructure and the capability of front-line workers to deal with the psychological impact of the pandemic. Almost 100 000 people in the country have succumbed to the virus, and to date almost 3.7 million infections have been recorded.

As the government prepares to lift the national State of Disaster amid mounting legal challenges to the act that enabled the lockdown, there are concerns that not enough people have been vaccinated and that herd immunity has not been achieved. World-renowned epidemiologist and former chairperson of the Covid-19 Ministerial Advisory Committee, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, has again called for vaccines to become mandatory.

Karim and other experts cannot put a timeline on when the virus will end, but they all agree that it will not be any time soon.

Karim believes that the country should look at countries such as France and the US, where people are required to show their Covid-19 certificates at indoor environments, including supermarkets and malls.

"That is how many countries reached the position where they were able to get high vaccination coverage but, importantly, they protected their indoor environments by restricting them to vaccinated people.

"It all comes down to individual choice."

And it remains individual choice that will determine the extent to which the virus remains a real threat to all South Africans.