



Covid-19 festive wave: Do not panic



Despite the recent spike in Covid-19 cases, Professor Abdool Karim has urged the to remain calm and to take preventative measures. Picture: Siyasanga Mbambani/DoC

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Cape Town - The country is facing another wave of Covid-19 infections, showing that the pandemic, which has robbed 150 000 South African children of one or both parents or a secondary caregiver, is not over yet.

Ahead of the festive season, when holidaymakers are expected to flock to beaches and entertainment venues across the country, the national department of health has warned people not to lower their guard as a spike in Covid-19 infections in four provinces, including the Western Cape, has been identified.

Health Department spokesperson Foster Mohale said although this was a concern, the public must not panic and must continue to take preventative measures against the virus.

“We can confirm that there has been a slight increase in the number of positive cases of Covid-19 in some parts of the country, especially in provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Limpopo and the Western Cape. This is also a confirmation that the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions doesn’t mean the pandemic is over.”

Epidemiologist and infectious diseases expert Professor Abdool Karim said the world was not out of the woods yet. He said the spike was experienced in a number of countries, not just in South Africa.

“Among the countries that are battling with the current Covid-19 spikes is Singapore, which is experiencing severe cases. These cases are driven by new variants, and there are many of them,” said Karim.

Karim said in South Africa the recent spikes were driven by the X.1 and BB. variants, which are the sublineages of the Omicron variant. He said that although there was an increase in Covid-19 infections, these cases had not resulted in many hospitalisations.

“We were expecting a new wave by October and that wave didn’t come, but what we have seen is an increase of Covid-19 positive tests in sewage. However, the public must not panic,” he said.

He warned the public to avoid poorly ventilated places and to wear masks in crowded places.

Professor Cheryl Cohen, of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), said testing was at a very low level at present and this was affecting the interpretation of data.

e did observe an increase in the percentage of cases testing positive over the last few weeks, likely reflecting an increase in transmission in the community. In general case numbers have remained low, there was a small increase in case numbers in the week ending 15 October but this was not sustained and case numbers have remained stable or decreasing in recent weeks,” said Cohen.

Cohen also confirmed that hospitalisations were at low levels and had not shown an increasing trend. She said this was probably because of the high levels of immunity in the population.

However, Cohen warned that with the festive season approaching, the country might expect an increase in Covid-19 cases.

”With increased travel and gatherings over the festive season it is possible that we will see another increase in transmission. Covid-19 still remains a potentially severe disease, particularly for the elderly or those with underlying illness,” she warned.

Provincial Health Department spokesperson Mark van der Heever said that on November 1 there were 229 active cases of Covid-19 in the province.

He said that although the province was recording new cases, the level of infections was nowhere near that experienced during the height of the pandemic.

”We are learning to live with Covid, and the best defence against severe infections is to get vaccinated.

”Our teams are still offering vaccination against Covid at outreaches and facilities.” Van der Heever said during this season people should socialise in a safe and responsible manner.

“While summer brings festivities and more social engagement, we have also learned that if we engage in safe behaviours, we reduce the risk of spreading diseases, such as doing things outdoors, ensuring the windows are open indoors to allow for fresh air, and wearing your mask when you are not feeling well, especially when with vulnerable persons,” he said.

Meanwhile, a Unicef report said that Covid-19 had robbed 150 000 South African children of one or both parents or a secondary caregiver.

“The tragic and increasing number of Covid-19 orphans is also a reminder that Covid-19 is not over, and the virus has led to the deaths of more than 1 million people globally this year alone, according to WHO figures,” the report said.

“Unicef South Africa continues its Covid-19 response with the national and provincial departments of Health to help build further momentum towards the 70% coverage target of the adult population by the end the year. This includes strengthening vaccine cold-chain management and systems, as well as communication and community engagement work to bolster Covid-19 vaccine coverage and routine childhood immunisation.”

Unicef deputy representative for South Africa Muriel Mafico said the loss of a parent or caregiver had lifelong effects on children.

“Children’s lives have been devastated by the pandemic in so many ways and for those who have lost parents or caregivers the deep scars will last forever.

“But with love and care, access to social protection, education and opportunities for growth and development, these children can recover, thrive and realise their full potential.”

Since the pandemic, nearly 10 000 children in the Western Cape have ended up in foster care.
