Early alarm bells sound for Fifth Wave

South Africa braces for another barrage as Covid-19 cases rise and wastewater has new subvariant.

By Estelle Ellis

Early warnings — including a rise in the number of positive cases and the detection of the BA.4 and BA.5 variants in wastewater — indicate that the country is experiencing a new wave of the virus.

The South African Institute for Clinical Virology (SACV), Professor Adrian Pillay, said on Thursday, 21 April, that the country is facing a “new and dangerous” wave of Covid-19.

“While the country has managed to suppress the virus since the start of the pandemic, we are now seeing an increase in cases,” Pillay said.

The SACV has identified the BA.4 and BA.5 variants, which are considered “variants of concern” by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The BA.4 and BA.5 variants are known for their ability to escape immunity, which means that people who have already had Covid-19 may not be protected from reinfection.

“The emergence of these variants highlights the importance of continued vaccination and the need for booster doses,” Pillay said.

A new report from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) showed that the number of Covid-19 cases has increased by 24% week-on-week, with the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces seeing the highest increases.

The NICD also warned that the country could see an “early and rapid” peak of cases in May, with peak numbers expected to peak in June.

“While we are not expecting a return to the levels seen during the height of the pandemic, we urge caution and continued adherence to public health measures,” the NICD said.

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