

Experts expecting a Covid-19 surge this summer

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The Covid-19 third wave has come and gone, but a possible fourth wave looms.

Public health expert and head of the Public Health and Nursing School at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Professor Mosa Moshabela said: "Given what we've seen around the world, we do expect that we will see a surge in infections during the summer in South Africa.

"We don't know exactly when it will start and how bad it's going to be, and we don't know what kind of a variant is going to drive it."

Moshabela said the infection rates in Singapore and in the UK are high now, and there is a new variant in the UK.

"They think it might be related to the Delta variant, but they are still waiting for new information.

"So given that some parts of the world already have this variant, we can expect that we might also have to deal with a different variant."

So far, Moshabela said cases are low and surveillance is continuing.

He said they have not picked up any signs yet to suggest that we might have a new variant.

He said that whenever cases are low, it's easy for people to become complacent and feel like Covid-19 is gone.

"We need to understand that there are always germs lying around even though we don't see them. It's the same thing when we know there is Covid-19 lurking around, you don't have to see it, just know it's there and do anything you can to prevent the spread of it."

Moshabela said it will take a combination of prevention measures and vaccinations for us to keep Covid-19 under control.

Professor Salim Abdool Karim, epidemiologist and former co-chair of South Africa's Covid-19 ministerial advisory committee (MAC), said when they look at the way in which the epidemic has unfolded in SA, they have seen that after each wave there was about a three-month period when there was very low transmission.

"We had the same between our first and second waves, and the same between our second and third waves.

"That's roughly between 94 and 99 days. So for argument's sake let's just say it's a three-month interval.

"And if that three-month interval repeats itself as it did previously, we can expect to have some kind of new wave at the end of that three months, which is the end of December.

"But there are many things that will determine whether we have a fourth wave and the critical variable that we don't know is whether there'll be a new variant, because a new variant is going to be an important part of the equation if we are going to have a severe fourth wave.

"If we don't get a new variant, if it's just simply the Delta variant trying to spread again, we're likely to have a very mild fourth wave," said Karim.

If we want to be better prepared for the fourth wave, Karim said we've got to increase vaccination coverage.

"The highest priority is the people aged 60 plus, and we're doing reasonably well there."

He said that if teens are vaccinated "that gives us an opportunity to help reduce overall transmission.

"So even though the vaccine doesn't benefit them [teens] too much personally, it will have an impact on the overall epidemic."