

PANDEMIC

Covid-19 data predicts a safe election day

NATHAN CRAIG
nathan.craig@inl.co.za

MEDICAL experts have allayed fears of an increase in the number of Covid-19 infections that could be attributed to the local government elections.

The country's recent departure from the third wave and low infection rates were expected to allow for a safe election day, they said.

Infectious diseases epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim said now was likely the safest time to have elections, but that did not mean there was no risk.

"Elections are of vital democratic importance but we cannot allow for them to become superspreader events. We must not give Covid-19 the oppor-

tunity to spread, so people must still social distance, wear masks and sanitise. Vaccinations also need to continue so the country can become inoculated against the virus," he said.

Abdool Karim said complacency remained the enemy and all protocols needed to be adhered to for a safe election day and December holiday season.

"There are less than 1000 cases per day now which is exactly what we want, and it must stay that way. As things stand, elections could not have been timed better if we tried. It is in that sweet spot for us. That being said, the fourth wave is still coming as there is a period of between three to four months between waves, which means it was expected to hit in December," he said.

Vaccinologist Professor Shabir Madhi

from Wits said the riskiest aspect of the elections was the campaigning, but following the exit of the third wave and ongoing vaccination drive there was a high degree of protection.

Madhi added that Covid-19 was still a reality and people should not let their guards down in spite of the relatively safe period.

According to data from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, the daily infections have not exceeded 1000 new confirmed cases per day this week. There were 475 new cases as of Friday, bringing the total number of active cases to 18657 and 2921589 infections since the onset of the pandemic.

There were 5553 active cases in KwaZulu-Natal, placing it atop the list of being the province with the most active

Covid-19 cases. The second highest case load was experienced by the Western Cape with 5496. However, the Eastern Cape could boast about having the lowest number of active cases with their total of 298. An additional 47 deaths were recorded bringing the tally up to 89151, but the recovery rate stood at 96.3%, with 2813781 citizens surviving their bouts with the virus.

Health Minister Joe Phaahla has appealed for caution, warning that although current infections numbers were stable, they might rise as a result of elections becoming fertile ground for transmissions.

As a result, Phaahla said the department would establish about 1000 pop-up vaccination sites at voting stations on Monday.