

New Covid-19 wave coming

Scientists warn Covid-19 fifth wave likely to hit SA in May, dependent on a new variant

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Scientists have warned that the Covid-19 fifth wave is likely to hit SA in May, dependent on a new variant.

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced on Monday that government has decided to lift the national state of disaster, which had lasted for 750 days.

He said some transitional measures, such as the wearing of masks indoors and providing a vaccination certificate or a negative Covid-19 test at large events, will remain in place for the next 30 days.

Covid-19 will thereafter be managed in terms of the National Health Act once the period for public comment closes and comments have been considered.

Professor Salim Abdool Karim, a prominent public health specialist, epidemiologist, and infectious diseases specialist, reminded South Africans that we are still living in a pandemic. He said if past trends continue, it is likely that we will see a new wave of infections in early May.

Karim, however, said this is largely dependent on the emergence of a new Covid-19 variant in the country.

"There are some early indications, for example, BA.4 is now increasing in South Africa — Deltacon is increasing in some countries — but a clear-cut new variant has not been reported yet," Karim said.

He explained that it is unlikely that a new wave will be driven by a past variant,



Prominent public health specialist, epidemiologist, and infectious diseases specialist, Professor Salim Abdool-Karim. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

as many people have developed immunity either from natural infection or vaccination.

Karim, who chaired the ministerial ad-

visory committee (MAC) on Covid-19, welcomed the lifting of the national state of disaster, saying that the current low transmission rate made this a good

time to ease restrictions.

He did, however, say that some measures should remain to help reduce the likelihood of a new variant being detect-

ed. "We need to make sure that we continue testing as much as possible so that when a new variant comes along, we test for it, and we know it exists and we can monitor it."

He said we also need to ensure that we continue our indoor mask-wearing as well as keep some control on mass gatherings.

UKZN public health professor Mosa Moshabela said while government's decision to lift the national state of disaster is welcomed, it doesn't mean the Covid-19 pandemic is a thing of the past.

He stressed that we still have to be careful. "Other measures, such as monitoring temperatures, registering names for contact tracing and so forth, we may do away with.

"But I would be interested to see what the outcome of public comments for the draft regulations for the National Health Act are going to be.

"If there is recognition that we still need to be able to trace people, then perhaps some of these means may be maintained at a time when we have increases in infections, but perhaps not all the time."

On Thursday, South Africa recorded 1 481 new Covid-19 cases, five new deaths and 13 083 active cases.

Gauteng has the highest number of active cases, 5 561, followed by KZN with 3 782 cases and then the Free State with 1 408 active cases.