

Sowetan Says

Openness is vital for public trust

On Monday evening, South Africans watched as Dr Zweli Mkhize and a team of medical experts advising the government briefed the nation on the fight against Covid-19.

Although not entirely new, the information shared gave insight into what lies ahead in the next months to come and, importantly, what we ought to prepare for practically and in our national psyche.

In sobering detail, renowned epidemiologist Prof Salim Abdool Karim was clear that the virus is here to stay.

“Once we end the lockdown, about 55-million people are vulnerable to this virus. As soon as the opportunity arises for this virus to spread, we are likely to see the exponential curve again,” he said.

Granted, it is not what the nation ideally wants to hear, but it is an uncomfortable truth we must confront.

Perhaps most important to come out on Monday was the scientific rationale behind some of the decisions made by government regarding the length and degree of the lockdown period.

We learnt that through deliberate screening and testing, government ideally wants to drive down the number of new infections to below 44 a day before the lockdown is lifted.

If that number remains between 45 and 89 infections a day, provided there is low community transmissions in high-dense areas, a soft lockdown could be considered where certain restrictions may be eased.

However, if the average infection rate is more than 90, the team advises that the lockdown remains in place to enforce social distancing and promote targeted testing.

“We need a systematic approach to keeping infection rates low while easing the lockdown in stages,” Karim said.

Monday’s briefing was well far and wide.

For many it was reassuring that decisions made by government in this tough time are influenced by scientific data available and the wisdom of those who are experts in the field, rather than the uninformed whims of political elites.

Most crucially, it was a reminder for all that transparency is a powerful prerequisite for public trust and cooperation.