

NATION

Good chance vaccines can beat Omicron variant, says Professor Karim

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THE fact that Omicron was detected so early by South African scientists demonstrates the success of the investment the country has made in science.

This was among sentiments expressed by the Health Ministry and a panel of scientists at a media briefing yesterday.

World-renowned epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim said that while studies were still being done, there was a likelihood, based on how other variants have reacted to the available vaccines, that they would also work against Omicron.

"Closing the borders has almost no benefit for two reasons. As of yesterday, there were already 11 countries reporting cases of Omicron. Trying to isolate South Africa or southern Africa is not really going to help because pretty soon many other countries are going to become avenues of the spread of the virus.

"More importantly, we have an existing five-step strategy that actually does very well in reducing travel transmission risk... that is: by ensuring that only vaccinated people travel; you do symptom screening at boarding; you ensure they have a negative PCR result at boarding;

you have a mask during the flight; and, lastly, you get a Covid test on arrival," Karim said.

As the disease spreads, Gauteng has been identified as a hotspot.

Gauteng Health Department deputy director-general, Dr Freddy Kgongwana, said the province had an additional 4 000 hospital beds – kept over from the peak of the third wave – above the 18 000 they usually had.

Kgongwana said the department was meeting oxygen supplier Afrox on a weekly basis, and would have enough going into the fourth wave.

"As we speak, we have a staff com-

plement of 6 000 for the Covid-19 contracted personnel, which ends on March 31 2022. We have submitted to our principals that we need it to continue into the financial year 2023.

"The attitude that we have been maintaining since the third wave is to constantly monitor our PPE, that we do with supply chain; the security of water; the security of power supply; we are monitoring our generators; the security of waste management and laundry services.

"We are constantly monitoring those key issues, because they are very important in making sure our experts and staff

in the forefront are well supported," Kgongwana said.

Clinical doctor, Dr Unben Pillay, said GPs were generally reporting mild cases in private practice.

He said doctors had been made aware over the past few days about how to deal with another influx of positive cases.

"This is so that we are aware of what needs to happen in terms of management and treatment with the fourth wave.

"Overall, our cases that we are seeing are positive cases, in vaccinated and unvaccinated cases.

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