KZNM SEVERE WEATHER WARNING

Disaster Management Teams have been placed on high alert in Wawawo, Nataal, noting a severe weather warning with thunderstorms and flooding expected to hit large parts of the province this week.

Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs MEC, Sipho Hlomuka said heavy downpours could lead to localized flooding. Strong winds and large amounts of hail have also been forecast.

Over the next 24 hours, between 20mm and 40mm of rainfall is expected over parts of KZN, while between 5mm and 10mm of snowfall is expected over the Drakensberg and in Lebowa.

Residents living in low-lying areas and close to rivers in the Ugu, Hluhluwe, eMzumhlu, uThukela, uMnyathi and Amajuba Districts and the eThekwini Metro have been warned to take the necessary precautions, SA Weather Service forecaster Steve Qwabe said the rain was expected to clear by Friday.

Raymond Perrier, coordinator of the National Homeless Network, said although sites for the homeless were closed during lockdown, the weather was warmer and drier, they had to accommodate the homeless to deal with the approaching colder weather.

Perrier said that 600 and 140 women who were disabled, elderly and sick had been housed in buildings.

The emergency shelter kept at the Derini Hurley Centre, while the women are being housed at the YMA and a new municipal shelter in Mamelodi.

The younger and healthier have been housed in tents, he said.

“We have also identified the tents with leaks and have had them fixed. Sandbags have been used to prevent flooding on the ground where the tents are situated,” he said.

Perrier added the eThekwini Municipality’s Safety City teams were on stand-by throughout the lockdown and working outside of normal working hours to ensure the homeless were being attended to.

“Running this programme is like trying to build a plane while flying it. We’re doing things as best we can and as they come up,” Perrier said.

Deputy Mayor Belinda Scott, who has taken the city’s homeless programme under her wing, said medical mobile clinics were on site to attend to the homeless daily.

She said additional blankets would be provided to the homeless.

“Each site has a manager, static security and enrolled nurses who are assisted by metro police.

“The staff are all over from unrav- ended and the staff will be on duty during the inclement weather,” Scott said.

Homeless people on the streets of Durban, who are not staying in the shelters provided, said they used plastic sheets and cardboard to protect them from the rain and cold.

Flu Season: Screening and Testing Will Face Challenges

World-renowned virologist Professor Abubot Kolbin said scientists did not yet have a clear understanding of what seasonality meant for the coronavirus.

Kolbin, who also heads government’s Covid-19 ministerial advisory committee, said, “We must start on the basis that we have only known about this virus for four months, so we have not very seen how its seasonality changes. We know from influenza that it’s seasonal and spreads mostly in winter. We don’t know that about the coronavirus.”

He said some people had suggested the virus followed a similar seasonality because of the different manner in which it had affected the northern and southern hemispheres.

“When the virus was spreading in January and February, the countries in the north – Italy, Spain the US and Germany – had most of the spread. However, in countries in the south – Australia and New Zealand – the virus had not spread that much. So there were some initial hypothesis there might be some seasonality,” Kolbin said.

But, Abubot Kolbin added, “the evidence is firmy and just not robust enough to make any conclusions.”

As South Africa enters its colder, winter months, the Department of Health’s screening and testing programme would face challenges in differentiating those infected with Covid-19 from those with regular flu.

“We know that we’ll start seeing an increase in the flu in the next month or two. When we go into fully-fledged flu season there’ll be a lot of people going to doctors and hospitals with flu. Coronavirus and flu present similarly,” Kolbin said.

Kolbin said flu potentially being as severe as and Abubot Kolbin said doctors would have to conduct tests for Covid-19 when patients presented with flu symptoms. It was possible that tests for flu would be done at the same time, he added.

Kolbin said South Africans should consider having a flu vaccine, but warned that it would not protect them from Covid-19 infection.

He reiterated the importance of wearing or sanitizing hands, practising physical distancing and wearing face masks during winter.

According to the latest Statistics South Africa Mortality and Causes of Death report released in March, flu was the cause of 18 837 or 4.2% of all natural deaths in 2017.

On these, elderly women aged 65 and over comprised 3 831 or 41% of deaths. 1 038 women.

Nikwele Chophela, who sleeps on the street with other elderly mothers, said they wrapped themselves in plas- tic every night to keep warm.

“When you are wet, it becomes even more cold and we battle to sleep,” said Chophela.