

BE CAUTIOUS

Another wave of Covid-19 looming

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SOUTH Africa could be in for a grim festive season as Covid-19 numbers spike across the country, dampening hopes of an economic recovery especially in the tourism sector.

The Health Department says "technically" we could already be in a sixth wave as the number of infections started increasing from September.

The department warned people to remain cautious as they prepared to flock to beaches and entertainment venues over the festive period.

The latest Covid-19 statistics, released this week, showed there were 5 984 active cases countrywide: 1 874 in the Western Cape; 1 324 in Free State; 976 in KwaZulu-Natal, and 922 in Gauteng.

The percentage of those who tested positive in the other provinces were lower than 10%, said Department of Health spokesman Foster Mohale.

He said the symptoms were the same as before, but milder and more easily confused with the flu and, in children, with other respiratory illnesses.

The spike comes after the UN International Children's Emergency Fund recently said it had found more than 100 000 children had been orphaned by Covid in the past two years.

"The tragic and increasing number of Covid-19 orphans is also a reminder that Covid-19 is not over, and the virus has led to the deaths of more than one million people globally this year alone," according to the World Health Organization.

Unicef deputy representative for South Africa Muriel Mafico said the loss of a parent or caregiver had lifelong effects on children, and that stability was key. "Children's lives have been devastated by the pandemic in so many ways and for those who have lost parents or caregivers the deep scars will last forever."

At the end of June, the government gave the green light for masks to come off. Now experts are again calling on people to exercise caution.

Mohale called on people not to panic, but to remember the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions did not mean the pandemic was over.

Epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim said there was an increase in Covid-19 cases in a number of countries, not just in South Africa.

"Among one of the countries battling with the current Covid-19 spikes is Singapore, which is experiencing severe cases. These cases are driven by new variants, and there are many of them," said Abdool Karim.

He said the recent spikes were driven by lineages of the Omicron variant but had not translated into hospitalisations.

Abdool Karim warned people to stay away from poorly ventilated places and to wear a mask in crowded places, warning that the virus "is still among us".

In a WhatsApp message circulating in Durban, Dr Shivani Singh from the Ramakrishna Clinic of South Africa, urged people to again "maintain precautions of wearing masks, hand hygiene, distancing and self isolation if unwell and to get vaccination boosters, especially if not done in the last six months.

"Please be aware that we are seeing an increase in Covid infections this week with hospital admissions and symptomatic patients particularly flu-like symptoms, sinusitis and chest involvement," wrote Singh.

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