



COGTA
Health
Social Development

ADVISORY: MOBILISING SOCIETY AND BUSINESS TO FIGHT AGAINST THE THIRD WAVE OF COVID-19

THE MULTI-SECTORAL COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

We note that South Africa is experiencing rise in COVID-19 infections, which has compelled government to move the country back to lockdown alert level 3, which limits movement of people and gatherings.

We note that many people have continued to comply with non-pharmaceutical interventions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including by wearing masks, sanitising hands, limiting physical contact and gathering only outside or in well-ventilated areas. We welcome this and thank everyone who has continued to comply with non-pharmaceutical interventions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We also note and welcome the government's effort in continuing to implement phases of COVID-19 vaccine rollout strategy. However, in order to achieve the required herd immunity through the vaccination programme, there is still a need to continuously drive social behavioural change among citizens and business; as well as continued efforts to debunk the misconceptions and myths surrounding the vaccine.

We have noted with concern that the business sector, in particular, retail and supermarkets, is no longer diligently controlling the crowds inside the shops which has a bearing for the required social distance of 1.5 metres.

We have also observed that people tend to walk around without their masks on while in public places. We acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on both individual citizens and business alike, which has seemingly resulted in a high degree of fatigue. It is our duty as individuals, communities, civil society, and government to continue to encourage and promote the adherence to the COVID-19 protocols, as well as the continued practice of the non-pharmaceutical interventions.

The recommendations below were raised in a previous Advisory, which was aimed at mobilising society to fight against the second wave of COVID-19. The MAC believes that they are still and even more relevant now in the third wave, and offer it here again, with minor additions.

Therefore, the SBC MAC advises that:

Partnering with civil society

1. Government partners with civil society organisations in developing and disseminating social behavioural change messages. Each member of the MAC identifies champions (about 5 to 10) within their respective networks of organisations and sectors that will be pulled into a broader group to facilitate engagements between government and civil society organisations. The SANAC member database can be used as a primary source in drawing champions from civil society organisations, together with other civil society and organised labour structures.
2. Community leaders be recognised as crucial role players in leading social behavioural change with communities, in particular, in events such as funerals where leaders are encouraged to make the necessary determinations in accordance with the regulations.

Public communication

3. In order to reach the grassroots levels of society, government needs to embark on a vigorous communication campaign which should utilise instruments such as the public broadcaster (television and radio), as well as instruments of various organisations that have the capacity to communicate. Using both commercial and community radio stations to communicate will ensure that even rural citizens and those residing in congregant care facilities such as: old age homes, mental health, palliative, stepdown, cancer and NGO care facilities receive the information and messages.
4. Government partners with the private sector to develop an independent platform wherein government, private organisations, and civil society organisations could deposit information and extract from it to further communicate in their respective spaces. Again, SANAC communication platforms and networks could be useful here.
5. Government adopts a community-led approach of public communication by identifying and collaborating with community agents (influential people within communities), such as local government and traditional leaders, who will serve as health promotion ambassadors and take ownership of the messages.
6. Improve and increase active case search for improved case identification, isolation and care, and tracing of contacts; make the COVID Alert SA app more user friendly when reporting positive result as it requires a pin which is only sent to a cell number, it should be part of the lab result sheet, in the event the person passes on the family can then log it.
7. Government publishes composite National Guidelines that provide practical directives and protocols for the prevention and management of coronavirus infection at long-term care facilities, such as old age homes, and for residential home-based care; as well as guidelines on how to care for and support the elderly persons at home.

Debunking the vaccine myths

8. Government, through science, explains in a simple manner how vaccines work and unpacks the details of the efficacy and advantages of the vaccine in order to debunk the myths and misunderstandings circulating within societies.
9. Government develops and makes readily available, a package of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) addressing all the misconceptions about the vaccine and develops a comprehensive communications strategy to ensure that influential people are able to assist in disseminating correct and easy to understand information.
10. Government urgently invests in direct workplace and community based information dissemination and workshops to provide information on the vaccine and to dispel the misinformation that continues to circulate. Healthcare workers should be targeted in these efforts.
11. Government outlines publicly, the plans in place to safeguard the vaccine against theft and potential corrupt actions, and specifies the consequences in such cases.

Engaging Social Behaviour Change Experts

12. Government re-engages with the Social Behaviour Change experts who had been involved in July-August, and revisit the social behaviour change models and strategies they recommended, in collaboration with the MAC in enhancing strategies for sustained behaviour change.

Promoting household-based health conduct towards sustainable social behavioural change

13. Government develops a step-by-step guideline for households in the event of death from COVID-19, at home.
14. Government develops a step-by-step guideline for families on how to behave when a member dies from COVID-19.
15. Pulse oximeters be offered as part of the package of care in the public sector so that high risk patients who have COVID-19 but are managed at home, have access to regular pulse oximetry checks. This can be achieved through public health care facilities having a stock of pulse oximeters. When a patient receives a COVID-19 positive result, they should be informed that they will receive a pulse oximeter on loan from the local health facility; or alternatively, that the CHWs in the area have been provided with pulse oximeters and will conduct regular checks. The loaned pulse oximeters should come with information about use and symptoms and when to activate the emergency medical services. Once the oximeter is not needed by the patient any more, it can be returned, sterilised, and given to someone else.

Reinforcing compliance with the regulations

16. Government reinforces the role of Environmental Health Practitioners in monitoring compliance with the regulations, in particular, adherence to quarantine / isolation procedures and the handling of funeral services by families and undertakers.

17. Government tightens compliance with regulations governing the handling of human remains, in particular, by the undertakers and religious leaders conducting funerals.

18. Government takes action against people, including government officials and other influential people, who spread misinformation about COVID-19 and the vaccine.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, sweeping arch over a vertical stroke that ends in a small hook, followed by a dash.

Bishop M Mpumlwana
Chairperson
Multi-Sectoral MAC on Social Behaviour Change

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