

STATEMENT AT MEDIA BRIEFING BY MINISTER OF HEALTH DR JOE PHAAHLA ON THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS ON THE LIFTING OF NATIONAL STATE OF DISASTER

Tuesday, 05 April 2022

Colleagues in Cabinet

Members of the Media

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Good afternoon

President Cyril Ramaphosa last night addressed the nation on the lifting of the National State of Disaster which was declared in April 2020 in terms of the Disaster Management Act to have an integrated and coordinated response to the Covid-19 pandemic in line with the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The country now has exited the State of Disaster as initially indicated by government, however, the Covid-19 disease remains with us and continues to spread and infect people with rising numbers in other countries like China forcing the authorities to re-initiate or re-introduce lockdowns as part of efforts to control the pandemic.

In the past few weeks we have been experiencing low levels of infections, just at 8% rate of infections which is a manageable numbers and do not pose threat to our health infrastructure. At same time we continue to monitor the

situation through the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) and other partners in the health sector.

Accordingly, government has the requisite duty to ensure that as we exit the State of Disaster, the transitional measures are put in place to safeguard the positives achieved in the fight against Covid-19 and to ensure manageable recovery of the environment.

As Covid-19 remains a threat, we had to find other ways to deal with it within the existing legislation and public policy. We want to emphasize the few transitional measures which remain in place and will lapse after 30 days as outlined by the President last night:-

- We are still required to wear a face mask in an indoor public space covering both nose and mouths;
- The existing restrictions on gatherings will continue – indoor and outdoor venues can take up to 50% of their capacity without any maximum limit, provided that proof of vaccination or a Covid test not older than 72 hours is required at entrance of the venue;
- Travellers entering South Africa will need to show proof of vaccination or negative PCR test not older than 72 hours;
- The directions that provide for the payment of the special R350 Social Relief of Distress Grant remain in place;
- The direction that provide for the extension of the validity of a learners licence, driving licence card, licence disc, professional driving permit and registration of a motor vehicle remain in place.

In addition, there are Health Regulations under the National Health Act, that were gazetted for public comments until Saturday, 16 April 2022 to ensure that we continually have mechanism to control and manage the resurgence of Covid-19 and an outbreak of any pandemic in the future.

The Health Regulations as in Government Gazette will take effect immediately after the transitional measures have elapsed. The Regulations in the main seek to introduce few amendments to the Surveillance and Control of Notifiable Diseases and Medical Conditions, to include Coronavirus (Covid-19) as such.

In order to contain the spread of notifiable medical conditions, which notifiable medical condition may be spread, and guided by the scientific evidence of the risk of transmission of such notifiable medical condition, advice may be shared amongst the relevant Cabinet members and departments with regard to the following: Curfew, Gatherings, Sport activities and social festivities, operations in the economy, public transportation, religious and cultural practices, school opening and closure, sale; dispensing and consumption of alcohol, and lockdown of locality or the country.

The Regulations, also deal with the requirements for persons entering the Republic of South Africa based on the epidemiological situation of such a notifiable medical condition, that in this case vaccination certificate and or negative PCR test not older than 72 hours shall be presented at the point of entry.

We continue to receive enquiries about the fate of face masks, PRC tests post the 30 day period of the transitional measures, and we would like to reiterate that all these will be contained in the final health regulations. Thus, we would like to urge people to use this window period to help us shape the proposed health regulations to ensure they reflect the views and aspirations of our people as far as managing the current and future pandemics is concerned.

Vaccinations

It is important to remind our people that the lifting or termination of State of Disaster doesn't automatically mean the end of the pandemic, hence we encourage all eligible unvaccinated and partly vaccinated people to vaccinate because vaccine remains the only effective weapon for us to prevent the resurgence of the pandemic and high number of casualties.

As of 4th April 2022, over **44,5%** of adult population have fully vaccinated, which translates into **17, 459, 494** people. Whilst we have lift our state of disaster, our total number of vaccinated people is very low as compared to other countries that have lifted their lockdowns, which if we happen to be hit by another variant or wave, the chances of experience high level of transmissions and infections will be high.

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