

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

07 May 2021

Dear Staff and Students

COVID-19 RESPONSE TASK TEAM UPDATE

South Africa remains in a national “State of Disaster” and we are currently on Lockdown Level 1. The pandemic remains a major concern for our country. The reality is that we must continue to stay alert and take all of the necessary precautions to prevent the further spread of the disease. Please follow the public health guidelines; wear your face mask so it securely covers your nose and chin, wash your hands regularly with water and soap, use a minimum 70% alcohol-based hand sanitiser, practice social distancing, avoid large crowds and stay clear of poorly ventilated spaces. We have a combined responsibility to ensure that we minimize the impact of the expected third wave of infections. In the fight against COVID-19, complacency is our worst enemy. The pandemic is not over! We must play our part to limit the further spread of the disease.

Globally, more than 156 million people have been infected and over 19 million people are currently fighting the disease. Thankfully, more than 134 million people have recovered but tragically, over 3.2 million people have passed on due to complications from COVID-19. Several countries, including India, Brazil, USA, Turkey, Argentina and France are seeing new cases that number more than 15000 per day.

COVID-19 statistics for the DUT community:

TOTAL NUMBER OF POSITIVE CASES:	244
TOTAL NUMBER OF STAFF WHO TESTED POSITIVE:	129
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO TESTED POSITIVE:	115
NUMBER OF NEW CASES TO REPORT:	0
NUMBER OF NEW CASES (Students):	0
NUMBER OF NEW CASES (Staff):	0
LOCATION OF NEW CASES:	Durban 0 & PMB 0
NUMBER OF RECOVERIES:	234 (112 students & 122 staff)
TOTAL NUMBER OF DEATHS:	10 (7 staff & 3 students)
TOTAL NUMBER OF ACTIVE CASES:	0 (0 staff & 0 students)
CONTACT TRACING COMMENCED FOR NEW CASES:	No new cases reported
DISINFECTION OF AREAS FOR NEW CASES:	No new cases reported

Yesterday, the Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize issued a statement confirming that there was “a worrying increase of COVID-19 cases throughout South Africa.” The Minister announced that the districts below, have all recorded an average rise of 20% or more in the past 14 days and that the increase in positive cases “should be taken as serious warning.”

Province	District
Free State	Mangaung Metro
Free State	Fezile Dabi
Free State	Xhariep
Free State	Lejweleputswa
Gauteng	City of Johannesburg Metro
Gauteng	Sedibeng
Gauteng	Ekurhuleni Metro
Gauteng	City of Tshwane Metro
KwaZulu-Natal	eThekweni Metro
Limpopo	Capricorn
Limpopo	Mopani
Mpumalanga	Nkangala
Mpumalanga	Gert Sibande
North West	Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompak
North West	Dr Kenneth Kaunda
North West	Bojanala Platinum
Northern Cape	Pixley Ka Seme
Northern Cape	ZF Mgcawu
Northern Cape	Frances Baard
Western Cape	Cape Winelands
Western Cape	Overberg

One of the most challenging aspects of managing a virus is the fact that viruses naturally mutate. That is, they change genetically and structurally over time. The coronavirus, the virus that causes COVID-19, is no exception.

New variants of the coronavirus

As a result of mutations, there are now many new 'variants' or mutated new versions of the original coronavirus, in circulation around the world. In fact, almost all of South Africa's positive cases are now caused by a variant that was first discovered here last year, rather than the original type.

The issue with these new variants is that they are usually more virulent and more dangerous than the original type. While we still have more to learn, these new variants appear to spread more easily, they cause more serious disease and sadly, lead to increased fatalities.

India is an example of how a new coronavirus variant can result in immense suffering. The country is currently recording the highest number of COVID-19 infections ever seen, with over 300 000 people testing positive every day. Most COVID-19 positive people in India have been infected with a new variant recently discovered in that country. This variant has now spread to 20 countries and there is a distinct possibility that it could spread to South Africa. In fact, some scientists believe that it might already be in South Africa, spreading undetected. Our scientists are currently testing samples from people who travelled from India.

For reputable, verified COVID-19 information, please visit the National Institute for Communicable Diseases website: <https://www.nicd.ac.za>.

What we can learn from the tragedy taking place in India right now

The lessons to be learnt from the devastation of COVID-19 in India are to strictly guard against complacency and to heed the early warning signs of a rising epidemic curve of COVID infections.

Public Health vigilance demands a very high level of awareness of the infectious nature of the virus, its capacity to mutate and produce variants and the speed at which infections could spread and overwhelm the health system, cremations and burial capacity; and oxygen, PPE and vaccines supplies of a country.

Hence, for us in South Africa, we note that coronavirus infections are rising gradually in some provinces - and the consequent need to ensure **strict compliance with COVID-19 protocols and for extra vigilance.**

A new way of living

Although COVID-19 only reached South Africa 14 months ago, experts now say that we need to learn to live with the coronavirus as an endemic viral pathogen. This means that COVID-19 will be a constant presence in our country, probably for a significant period of time.

The constant presence of a significant threat to the health of all people in South Africa requires us to permanently shift our behaviour to protect ourselves and others from a disease that can be fatal.

The tools we have at our disposal remain the same:

Say YES to these proven, mandatory actions

- Wear a mask
- Wash your hands
- Watch your distance

Say NO to these situations

- Crowded places
- Closed spaces
- Close contact settings

And let us show

- Care
- Compassion
- Community

by

- Getting vaccinated (when possible)
- Isolating/quarantining as a service to others when appropriate
- Caring for the infected and the bereaved
- Addressing social injustices in our places of work and community



If you suspect that you may have COVID-19

COVID-19 affects different people in different ways. While some people develop no symptoms at all, most infected people develop mild to moderate illness, without requiring hospitalisation. Sadly, others become dangerously ill.

- If you suspect you may be positive for COVID-19, or if you develop symptoms, please contact the DUT Clinics via **WhatsApp** on **067 370 4482** or **083 783 7057** during office hours for medical advice from a professional nurse. If you live in residence, please inform your Residence Advisor immediately for advice. Please also inform your Head of Department or lecturer as soon as possible.
- Sometimes people with COVID-19 develop severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or high fever. In this case, please call the DUT Clinic as detailed above, during office hours, or contact **0600 123 456** (via WhatsApp).
- You can also contact the **National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) Hotline** on **0800 029 999**, or the **COVID-19 National Call Centre** on **012 337 1997** for advice on what steps to take next.
- If you do get tested, please send your COVID-19 test results to your Head of Department or Lecturer for forwarding to the COVID-19 hotline on covid-enquiries@dut.ac.za.
- If you test positive, you will be asked to list other DUT members with whom you have been in contact over the previous seven days and what DUT venues you have occupied. This is to ensure that close contacts self-isolate, and that venues are disinfected.
- No negative test is required for returning to campus after the 10-day quarantine period has elapsed.

Daily COVID-19 protocol at DUT

Please be aware that only those students and staff members who have been invited to come onto campus, and who have a valid entry permit, will be granted access to campus.

I. Before arriving on campus:

Please complete the **HealthCheck COVID-19 online form** every day, **before** leaving your place of residence. This online form is to screen for symptoms of COVID-19 and this process helps to prevent the disease from spreading. Please be completely honest in your responses to the questions before attempting to gain access to campus.

You can access the HealthCheck form in three ways:

- Dial HealthCheck on *134*832*2# (This is a free call).
- Go to: <https://healthcheck.higherhealth.ac.za>
- Add 0600 110 000 - <https://wa.me/27600110000?text=hi> to your WhatsApp to contacts.

If you get an **orange light** or a **red light**, please do not proceed to campus. Instead, please call the COVID-19 Hotline on 031 373 3760 or 031 373 2223 or email covid-enquiries@dut.ac.za for advice on what to do. Please also keep your Head of Department, lecturer or Residence Advisor informed. If you get a **green light** on HealthCheck, **wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, put on a mask** covering your nose, mouth and chin and then leave your place of residence.

2. When you reach the campus entrance, please:

- Allow the Security Officer to take your temperature. A higher than usual body temperature can be an indicator of fever, and fever can be a symptom of COVID-19.
- Show your student/staff card, your entry permit, and your HealthCheck result to the Security Officer.
- Sanitise your hands at the entrance.
- Keep a minimum distance of 1.5 metres away from other people.
- Please avoid shaking hands, fist bumps, hugging, kissing or any close contact with other people.
- DUT has a **#NoMaskNoEntry** policy: No entry will be granted to any person not wearing a mask which is securely covering the nose, mouth and chin.

Failure by a student or staff member on DUT premises to:

- Wear a mask that is securely covering the nose, mouth and chin;
- Maintain a minimum distance of 1.5 metres between themselves and any other individual; or
- Sanitise their hands at entrances to campuses and venues,

may result in disciplinary and/or criminal action, which could result in a fine, suspension, expulsion and/or a criminal record.

South Africa has resumed the Sisonke Protocol which will see more healthcare workers being vaccinated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine will be released soon - and South Africa can formally commence with the national vaccine rollout programme.

Over the months ahead, an increasing number of South Africans will be vaccinated and we urge you to monitor the situation as government will invite different categories of people (as per the vaccine rollout programme <https://www.nicd.ac.za/covid-19-vaccine-rollout-strategy-faq/>) to register for their vaccines. It is essential that you are aware of the call to register, once it has been announced.

Please stay safe, wear your mask, wash your hands, avoid large groups of people and observe social distancing. If we act together and follow the COVID-19 guidelines, we will save more lives...

Sincerely

DUT COVID-19 RESPONSE TASK TEAM



DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
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