

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

18 June 2021

COVID-19 RESPONSE TASK TEAM WEEKLY STATEMENT

Dear staff and students

This week, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a return to Lockdown Level 3 restrictions because of a massive surge in new COVID-19 infections. On 16 June, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) observed 13 246 daily new cases in the previous 24 hours, representing the highest number of daily cases recorded since January this year. New infection rates have way more than doubled in the past two weeks, and hospital admissions have increased by 59 percent in the same period. Since the beginning of the pandemic last year, over 58 000 people in South Africa have died. As a result of the rise in new infections and positivity rate, the President said that the health systems in several parts of the country are under threat.

While Gauteng is seeing the highest numbers of cases at present, KwaZulu-Natal is recording hundreds of new cases every day. This is cause for great concern.

Here are the latest COVID-19 statistics for DUT:

TOTAL NUMBER OF POSITIVE CASES:	251
TOTAL NUMBER OF STAFF WHO TESTED POSITIVE:	132
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO TESTED POSITIVE:	119
NUMBER OF NEW CASES TO REPORT:	4
NUMBER OF NEW CASES (Students):	2
NUMBER OF NEW CASES (Staff):	2

LOCATION OF NEW CASES – DURBAN/PIETERMARITZBURG: (Dbn 3 & PMB 1)

NUMBER OF RECOVERIES:	237
TOTAL NUMBER OF DEATHS:	10 (7 staff & 3 students)
TOTAL NUMBER OF ACTIVE CASES:	4 (2 staff & 2 students)
HAS CONTACT TRACING COMMENCED:	No new cases
HAS DISINFECTION OF AREAS COMMENCED:	No new cases

Tougher COVID-19 restrictions

The new restrictions signed into law include a nightly curfew tightened to 10pm to 4am, and extremely importantly, a limit of 50 people at indoor gatherings, including funerals and other religious gatherings. The number of people permitted to attend an outdoor event has been reduced to 100. It is at crowded events where there are large numbers of people in close proximity to each other for extended periods without sufficient ventilation that mass numbers of infections regularly take place.

Please help stop the spread of COVID-19

There is no doubt that South Africa has now entered a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This involves the rapid spread of the virus, and higher and higher daily infection rates. To prevent unnecessary suffering and fatalities, it is up to each one of us to stick to the tried and tested methods of stopping the coronavirus in its tracks:

- Please avoid all gatherings and face-to-face meetings.
- When greeting others, please avoid shaking hands, fist bumps, hugging and other physical contact.
- Ensure good ventilation when inside with others. Doors and windows should be left open. During the cooler part of the year, staff and students are kindly requested to bring warm clothing and/or a blanket to campus with them so that maximum ventilation can be allowed.
- Wear a mask covering your nose, mouth and chin in public and at DUT.
- Very importantly, please keep at least 1.5 metres between you and any other person not from your household.
- Keep your hands clean. Please sanitise your hands at DUT entrances and clean your hands throughout the day.

The situation is serious enough for the following procedure to be in place at DUT: if any student or staff member fails to observe DUT's mandatory COVID-19 guidelines of wearing a mask, social distancing by 1.5 metres and sanitising their hands at entrances, they will be liable to disciplinary and/or criminal action.

At this time of surging new infections, please do your utmost to prevent the further spread of this life-threatening disease. COVID-19 does not discriminate: anyone can get it, and how it will affect us and those close to us might be worse than we might imagine. We need to think not just of ourselves, but of others who might be more vulnerable to serious disease. Please follow the guidelines above as a matter of service to others.

Vaccines save lives

If you are a patient-facing student or staff member from the Faculty of Health Sciences, or a staff member over the age of 60, you are eligible for vaccination against COVID-19. Science has shown that the COVID-19 vaccines are both effective at saving lives, and safe. Unfortunately, false information has been circulating about the vaccines, leading some people to be hesitant about being vaccinated. But vaccines have a long history of saving lives.

Since the development of the world's first vaccine over three hundred years ago, smallpox, a disease that killed up to 500 million people in the 20th Century alone, has been wiped out. This is the result of the smallpox vaccine invented by Edward Jenner way back in 1796. Adopted by the world *en masse* as the only effective way to prevent this terrible disease, the international smallpox vaccination programme led to the World Health Organisation declaring in 1980 that smallpox had been eradicated from the globe. The reason? "It was eradicated solely through vaccination".

Since then, many other vaccines have been developed, and continue to save lives around the world. As children, we are routinely vaccinated against a number of life-threatening diseases, including measles, polio, TB and others. Were it not for these vaccines, many millions of us might have died or experienced immense suffering as a result of contracting these illnesses.

With COVID-19 vaccines now available to South Africans, we have the opportunity to protect ourselves and others from this dangerous illness, and work towards eradicating the disease that has changed and threatened our lives so drastically. For this reason, the COVID-19 Response Task Team strongly encourages anyone who qualifies for vaccination against COVID-19 to come forward. If you are patient-facing and from the Faculty of Health Sciences,

please contact your HOD for inclusion in the vaccination programme. Staff members over the age of 60 may contact the Employee Wellness Programme on ewp@dut.ac.za. Should you have questions about the vaccines, please consult the following resources: <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/vaccine-updates/> and <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/what-you-need-to-know-about-vaccines-in-general/> or email DUT's dedicated COVID-19 line on covid-enquiries@dut.ac.za

What to do if you think you may have COVID-19

- Remain in your place of residence.
- Contact the DUT Clinics for advice (see WhatsApp numbers below).
- Inform your Residence Advisor and/or Lecturer/HOD.
- Rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Treat your symptoms, eg take paracetamol (such as Panado) for fever and pain.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with your elbow, not your hand.
- Stay away from other people to prevent them from becoming infected.
- If you develop a high fever, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, contact your doctor, the DUT Clinics (see below for WhatsApp numbers) or the COVID-19 Hotline or WhatsApp lines (see below) for assistance.
- 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.

Mental health support for students and staff is just a phone call away 24 hours a day

Any student or staff member who is having emotional, mental health, relationship, study or other such difficulties is asked to reach out for help from the services available from DUT and other support organisations, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Counselling services for students

Students are invited to make a booking to speak to a psychologist or social worker online by emailing Counsbookingdbn@dut.ac.za (Durban) or Counsellingpmb@dut.ac.za (Midlands). Should you have an emergency during office hours, please email one of these addresses, or contact the 24-hour mental health support services after hours (see below for numbers).

Counselling services for staff

Staff are invited to contact the Employee Wellness Programme for counselling and support by emailing ewp@dut.ac.za.
Counselling is being offered online during office hours.

24-hour mental health support services

For 24-hour assistance, seven days a week, you can call one of the following organisations for assistance:

Higher Health National Hotline on **0800 36 36 36** or **SMS 43336**.

South African Depression & Anxiety Group (SADAG) on **0800 12 13 14**.

Lifeline on **0861 322 322**.

For assistance with dependence on alcohol and/or other substances

If you are having difficulty with alcohol and/or drug dependence, please contact

The South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA) on 08611 73422.

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Important contact numbers

- **DUT Clinics:** WhatsApp 067 370 4482 or 083 783 7057 (office hours).
- **COVID-19 Hotline:** 0800 029 999.
- **COVID-19 WhatsApp number:** 0600 12 3456.
- **DUT's COVID-19 Response Task Team Hotline:** 031 373 3760 or 031 373 2223 (office hours), or email covid-enquiries@dut.ac.za .

Daily COVID-19 protocol at DUT

Please note 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.

Consult these trusted sources for further information on COVID-19 and vaccination

- ➔ Visit the South African government's website at <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>
- ➔ Visit the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) at <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/>
- ➔ Visit the DUT COVID-19 webpage at <https://www.dut.ac.za/coronavirus/>

Finally, the COVID-19 Response Task Team makes a strong appeal to all members of the DUT community to avoid gatherings, crowded events, group events and in-person meetings. Please also observe the mandatory precautions at DUT: **wear a mask** covering your nose and mouth securely; **stay 1.5 metres from all other persons**; **clean your hands** frequently with soap and water or with a 70% alcohol solution; and get vaccinated against COVID-19 when your turn comes. Our lives are in each other's hands.

Please take care and be safe.

Sincerely

DUT COVID-19 Response Task Team