

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

30 July 2021

COVID-19 RESPONSE TASK TEAM WEEKLY STATEMENT

Dear staff and students

This week, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a return to adjusted Lockdown Level 3 in the national 'State of Disaster'. This slight relaxation in regulations is due to lower infection rates in some provinces compared with previous weeks.

Unfortunately, there is no cause for celebration. On Wednesday, South Africa recorded a whopping 17 351 new infections and 520 deaths in just one day! For a few days before that, lower new infection rates were being recorded. According to South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), the lower number of new COVID-19 cases was because fewer tests were being conducted.

Further, it might seem to be good news that the test positivity rate has dropped to just over 21%, but this rate is still four times higher than the rate at which scientists judge the spread of the coronavirus to be under control.

In this month's Bloomberg COVID Resilience Ranking, South Africa was placed a dismal 51st out of 53 countries in respect of various indicators, including vaccination coverage, mortality and COVID-19 containment. Deaths due to COVID-19 continue to be unacceptably high, and South Africa has now lost 73 338 people to the disease.

Considering the above, it should be abundantly clear that the COVID-19 pandemic is not under control, nor is it over. DUT remains absolutely committed to doing everything possible to curb the spread of the disease among the DUT community. Preventing the spread of the disease is within our control; we just need to follow the guidelines.

How we can beat COVID-19

Although the situation is dangerous, we should definitely not despair. As we as a university already know, knowledge is power. Scientific endeavour has discovered a few simple ways of greatly reducing your chances of catching COVID-19. These include: wearing a mask when you are in public (including at DUT); keeping 1.5 metres between you and anyone not from the same household/residence room as you; washing or sanitising your hands often; and avoiding crowds and closed spaces.

Although the new adjusted Lockdown Level 3 regulations permit indoor gatherings of up to 50 people, the COVID-19 Response Task Team continues to urge caution. Gatherings and meetings have the potential to become 'super-spreader' events where several people become infected at once. None of us can afford for this to happen. We therefore appeal to all staff and students to please exercise the utmost caution by avoiding group events.

Of course, the most powerful tool we have against COVID-19 is vaccination.

DUT's COVID-19 vaccination programme continues with vaccination of over 35s, cleaners and security staff

The COVID-19 Response Task Team, in collaboration with the Department of Health, Higher Health and King Edward VIII Hospital, this week began priority vaccination of staff over the age of 35, including members of our security and cleaning staff.

If you are 35 or older, and would like to be vaccinated against COVID-19, please click on the following link to secure a vaccination appointment:

<https://forms.office.com/r/gPwsb0rWDN>

You will also need to register on South Africa's Electronic Vaccination Data System (EVDS) by going to:

<https://vaccine.enroll.health.gov.za/#/>

You can also register using USSD, simply dial *134*832*IDNumber# (if you do not have an ID number, just dial *134*832#)

You can also register using Whatsapp, send the word REGISTER to 0600 012 3456

Please note that if you have tested positive for COVID-19, you will need to wait 30 days before vaccination from the date of positive test. Also ensure that you have informed DUT of your positive test result.

Please wait 30 days between different vaccinations, such as between a COVID-19 vaccination and a flu or hepatitis vaccination. This is to ensure the efficacy of each vaccine.

A few important facts about vaccination against COVID-19

If you get sick after you have been vaccinated, it is biologically impossible for you to have got COVID-19 from the vaccine. This is because the vaccines do not contain live viruses. Instead, your symptoms might be the result of becoming infected with COVID-19 just before or just after you were vaccinated. It usually takes about two weeks for your body to build up protection after vaccination, so you could get sick if the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection. If you have mild flu-like symptoms after vaccination, it can be the body's immune response showing that the vaccine is working.

Even if you are fully-vaccinated, you still need to follow safety protocols as outlined above. The reason for this is that the COVID vaccines protect you extremely well against getting severely ill or dying, but do not provide 100% protection against infection with COVID-19. A vaccinated person can still catch COVID-19, but will probably display no symptoms or mild ones, and is highly unlikely to become severely ill or die. The danger is that such a person could pass the disease on to others who might be more vulnerable or have particularly vulnerable family members and friends. For this reason, people who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 still need to wear a mask, maintain social distancing, wash their hands often, and avoid crowds and indoor gatherings.

If you have already had COVID-19, you should still be vaccinated. This is because experts do not yet know how long you are protected for after recovering from COVID-19. Studies have shown that vaccination provides strong protection in people who have recovered from COVID-19. Getting vaccinated is also a far safer way to develop protection than getting infected. You should, however, wait 30 days after the date of a positive COVID-19 test before getting vaccinated.

Here are the latest COVID-19 statistics for the DUT community:

Total number of positive cases: 273

Total number of staff who tested positive: 146

Total number of students who tested positive: 127

Number of new cases to report: 4

Number of new cases (students): 2

Number of new cases (staff): 2

Location of new cases in Durban: 2

Location of new cases in PMB: 2

Number of recoveries staff: 137

Number of recoveries student: 121

Total number of deaths: 10 (staff 7 and students 3)

Total number of active cases: 5

Total number of active cases staff:3

Total number of active cases students: 2

Has contact tracing commenced for new cases? Yes

Has disinfection taken place for new cases? Yes

We pray for the safe return to good health for all those who are fighting the infection.

In conclusion, it is important for us to never let down our guard while COVID-19 is still infecting thousands of people in our country and causing great suffering. To this end, please opt for **ventilated spaces** instead of closed, crowded spaces. **Avoid gatherings, wear a mask** covering your nose and mouth securely, **stay a minimum of 1.5 metres from all other persons, clean your hands** frequently with soap and water or with a 70% alcohol-based sanitiser - and **get vaccinated** against COVID-19 when your opportunity arises.

Please take care and stay safe.

Sincerely

DUT COVID-19 Response Task Team