

3 June 2021

Dear Colleagues

Re: Update on the State of COVID-19 and the 3rd Wave on the PSET System

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced on Sunday that the country has moved to Adjusted Alert Level 2. Several provinces have reached the threshold of a third wave of COVID-19 infections and the country as a whole is at high risk of entering a third wave. Thus, the time is now for us as a community to leverage the experience, knowledge and practice gained over the last 18 months to ensure a healthy campus community.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is similar to other airborne viruses which we have successfully responded to in the past (such as measles, mumps, and Flu's). Importantly, we now know that SARS-COV-2 is transmitted far more by aerosols than through surfaces.

The virus does not distinguish at all whom it infects, infecting everyone equally – the old, the young, the sick the healthy; but we know it is the elderly and people with uncontrolled comorbidities who suffer the most with severe disease. Asymptomatic & pre-symptomatic persons can still transmit the virus.

This body of knowledge allows us to ensure that when people need to be on campus, the focus should be on ensuring ventilation in indoor working spaces to reduce aerosol transmission by keeping windows open, doors open, and particularly prioritizing hosting events outside in the open air wherever possible.

On campus our immediate priority must be on increasing our solidarity and vigilance in observing prevention protocols. HIGHER HEALTH, highly recommends that institutions follow all HIGHER HEALTH protocols that were released last year and have been updated with evolving science and are available on HIGHER HEALTH's website <https://higherhealth.ac.za/>

It is paramount that when every person arrives for their classes, lectures or exams, they ensure that they have screened themselves before going into common areas and that they are free of COVID-19 symptoms and observe physical distancing and regular handwashing or sanitizing. It is necessary to observe the current government protocol of not exceeding 50% of a venue capacity, with a maximum of 100 people for indoor venues and a maximum of 250 people for outdoor venues.

These measures unfortunately also influence the wisdom of participating in high intense contact sports, which should be stopped for the third (and subsequent) wave(s).

The aim remains to decrease the dose of virus reaching an uninfected person by wearing a mask: "*I protect you by wearing a mask and you protect me by wearing a mask*".

Improving wellbeing. Inspiring success.

Directors: W de Villiers (Chairperson), A Bawa, M Mabizela, T Mayekiso, SJ Mlotshwa, N Phaswana-Mafuya, A Singh, D Tromp, B Madalane, R Ahluwalia (CEO)

Dealing with outbreaks in the PSET sector

Current scientific thinking suggests that the 3rd wave of COVID-19 infections in South Africa is likely to be due to the number of variants prevalent in South Africa, especially the 501.V2, first described about six months ago. This variant is linked to heightened transmissibility & no evidence of decreased pathogenicity. Further the variant detected in UK (B.1.1.7) as well as the current variant detected in India (B.1.617) have been found on our shores. However, it is unclear yet, whether the cause of the third wave is related to any of these other variants.

The high transmissibility of the current variant implies that we will have outbreaks of infection particularly in our residences as previously observed last year and the beginning of this year.

Our previous experience and existing protocols position PSET institutions to respond optimally to any future outbreaks. See the HIGHER HEALTH **Protocol on Managing Clusters of Outbreak of COVID-19 within PSET Institutions** (published 10 September 2020). <http://higherhealth.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/HIGHER-HEALTH-Protocol-on-Managing-Clusters-of-Outbreak-of-COVID-19-within-the-PSET-Institutions.pdf>

This Protocol presents five COVID-19 scenarios which institutions will need to manage in relation to COVID-19 infections on campuses. The Protocol also provides:

- A checklist to manage a cluster of infections, defined as two or more individuals testing positive for COVID-19 in the same location on campus within a period of seven days.
- Instructions for waste disposal and cleaning of educational establishments after a student or staff member or others have been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- A checklist for preparing the campus to sensitively manage students or staff who may be contacts or who have or may have COVID-19 symptoms.
- A checklist to follow if a student or staff member has been exposed to a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 or has COVID-19 symptoms.
- Guidance on steps to be undertaken following identification of confirmed COVID-19 case(s) in PSET institutions.

The COVID-19 Vaccination programme

The virus will be with us for a while longer, likely to co-exist with human mankind. We are now going into a phase where many people have been infected & many more will have been vaccinated. With the vaccination roll-out we expect to have lower levels of serious disease. The Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine rolled out under the Sisonke Trial is an experimental vaccine & we will tell over time whether it has been successful in terms of efficacy, however, early indicators are that rollout itself was a success with a mild side effect profile. Importantly, not a single case of abnormal clotting has been reported.

Currently, phase 2 of the vaccination rollout is underway with the Pfizer vaccine being administered to those over 60 years, who are most at-risk in the general population. It is important to highlight that both the J&J & Pfizer vaccines have scientifically demonstrated protection against infection, severe disease and deaths.

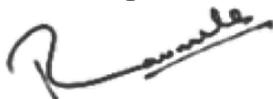
In addition to the incorporation of PSET healthcare workers and Health Sciences students and staffs priority into the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme; as part of Phase 1, which is currently being rolled out, HIGHER HEALTH, acknowledges the need for a vaccination strategy for a larger population of PSET Institution essential workers, ranging from academics, campus security, residence wardens, cleaning staff and student support services who are at a considerably higher risk of exposure to infection & further transmission the SARS-CoV-2 virus during their routine daily work. Against this, HIGHER HEALTH is currently undertaking a sector-wide consultative process to develop a proposed COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Strategy for the PSET sector. It is anticipated that all PSET staff will begin vaccinations immediately after the current Phase 2 of over 60 years roll out is completed. The challenging vaccination drive will also accompany trainings, educational awareness

and knowledge on the vaccines, to all our students and staff, which HIGHER HEALTH is busy developing, with NDoH and WHO.

HIGHER HEALTH encourages all students and staff to take the vaccination & reinstates that vaccination will not be compulsory in accordance with the South African Constitution.

HIGHER HEALTH thanks you for your support and commitment to mitigating the impact of burgeoning epidemics, as well as student health, wellness and development challenges, among our students in the Higher Education and Training sector.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ramneek Ahluwalia', written in a cursive style.

Dr. (Professor) Ramneek Ahluwalia
Chief Executive Officer