



— FROM THE DESK OF — THE PRESIDENT

• Monday, 6 December 2021 •

Dear Fellow South African,

As the country heads into a fourth wave of COVID-19 infections, we are experiencing a rate of infections that we have not seen since the pandemic started. The Omicron variant that was brought to global attention by South African scientists nearly two weeks ago appears to be dominating new infections in most provinces.

Over the last week, the number of daily infections has increased five-fold. Nearly a quarter of all COVID-19 tests now come back positive. Compare this to two weeks ago, when the proportion of positive tests was sitting at around 2%.

Scientists in our country and around the world are still hard at work to answer critical questions about the new Omicron variant, such as its transmissibility, its progression, whether it causes more severe disease and how effective vaccines will be against it.

While the surge in infections is of great concern, we should remember that we anticipated it. Disease modellers in our country have told us that we would likely experience a fourth wave around this time and that it was almost inevitable that new variants of the virus would emerge.

As we enter the fourth wave, and as the country gears up for the festive season, the urgent priority is for more people to get vaccinated. Scientific evidence shows that vaccination is the most effective means of preventing the spread of new infections, and that vaccines reduce severe illness, hospitalisation and death.

South Africa now has sufficient supplies of vaccines and we have vaccine stations set up in every part of the country. As every day passes, and as infections rise, the reasons to get vaccinated become more compelling and the need becomes ever more urgent.

Vaccines are safe, and like all other routine vaccinations we received as children and against diseases like measles, they offer the most potent form of protection available.

Vaccination is essential for our economic recovery, because as more people are vaccinated more areas of economic activity will be opened up. We can do our work and socialise under less stringent restrictions, and our lives can return to some degree of normality.

As individuals, we must carefully consider the implications of the risk to ourselves of being unvaccinated and the risk of spreading the infection to our children, parents, relatives, co-workers and those we do not even know.

The massive surge in infections means that, in addition to vaccination, we need to be far more diligent in reducing our contact with people outside our household. Social distancing is difficult as the festive season approaches, but the evidence shows that gatherings – mainly those held indoors – carry the greatest risk of transmission. Many people have been disappointed by the cancellation of some big events in recent days, but it is by far the safest and most responsible thing to do now.

Fortunately, we all know what we need to do, such as wearing masks, social distancing and avoiding crowds. Now we just need to make sure that we do these things more consistently and without exception.

As we work with greater urgency to increase vaccination rates, we need to significantly up our game on prevention measures to ensure our collective safety.

We should not wait for new regulations before we reduce the size of the gatherings, as research has shown this to be an effective means of reducing the spread of the virus.

All public and private facilities, including workplaces, taxis, buses and trains, must ensure adequate ventilation to prevent the spread of the virus.

Every facility that serves the public has a legal responsibility to ensure that people practice social distancing. We must reinvigorate our masking programme, where we insist on no entry into any public or business facility without a mask.

While we do not yet know what impact the Omicron variant will have on hospital admissions, we have been preparing hospitals to admit more patients, and we are investigating how we can quickly secure medication for treating COVID-19.

In the coming days and weeks we will know more about the Omicron variant. At the same time, we are keeping a close eye on the rates of infection and hospitalisation.

We will soon be convening a meeting of the National Coronavirus Command Council to review the state of the pandemic. This will enable us to take whatever further measures are needed to keep people safe and healthy.

I call on all South Africans to go out and get vaccinated without delay. If necessary, take advantage of the Vooma Vaccination Weekends that make it easier to visit the facility closest to you.

Let us all play our part in South Africa's social and economic recovery. Let us do the responsible and right thing for our own health and for the health of others.

With best regards,



To register for your COVID vaccination or for more information, visit sacoronavirus.co.za, call the toll-free line on 0800 029 999, send the word “register” via WhatsApp to 0600 123 456 or dial *134*832# and register via USSD. You can also walk-in to your nearest vaccination site and be registered and vaccinated on the spot.



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The Presidency, Union Buildings, Government Avenue, Tshwane, Gt 2001, South Africa

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