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Media Statement

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As at today the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases is 1505- this is an increase of 43 new cases from yesterday.

I continue to emphasize that we should not be complacent about the lower than expected increase in cases- we will only have a clear sense of the country status once we have embarked on our community screening and testing programme, which we expect to roll out in a couple of days.

We are very saddened to report two new deaths in KwaZulu Natal:

An 80 year old male who passed away on 1 April 2020. He had no travel history and was admitted to hospital.

An 81 year old female who also had no travel history and was admitted to hospital. She passed away on 2 April.

Yesterday, I mentioned that there were two deaths which were still being assessed- we are still awaiting those reports.

Therefore, this brings the current total *confirmed* COVID-19 related deaths to 7 (with 2 pending reports).

We are very grateful that our current reality is that the vast majority of patients are mild presentations that we are able to manage out of hospital.

Western Cape

Today I was very pleased to engage the Provincial leadership of the Western Cape and to visit the community and facilities in Khayelitsha

As we all know the Western Cape is the second most affected province in the country and so I was very keen to see the progress that has been made in this region.

Initially, the first few cases they were largely imported. Increasingly the western cape is seeing local and sporadic transmission. We are also seeing increasing hospital admissions.

It was very gratifying to see that distribution of cases has been well analyzed with geographic mapping. Of particular importance is robust tracking and tracing in order to understand the contacts that are associated with a particular infection and the related socio-economic dynamics that are emerging. We are now seeing spillover into vulnerable communities from densely populated areas- therefore the proactive community screening and testing programme could not be more timely.

We are very impressed with the work done here at the Province and support the approach they are taking. We wish to indicate that we are ready to support to ensure that we are able to meet the demands not only of COVID-19 but also of the impending disease burden that comes with the winter season. We have also reached out to WHO, who have indicated their willingness to assist with reinforcements not only in the Western Cape but in all the different provinces.

Video-conference with South African and Chinese Experts

We had a very interesting video-conference session with Chinese experts who had managed the outbreak in Shanghai, Wuhan and Beijing addressing a South African expert cohort including:

- Deputy Minister Dr Joe Phaahla
- Members of the Executive Council of Health and their Heads Of Department,
- the Ministerial Advisory Committee and
- senior members of the Department of Health.

We were also joined by the regional director and country representative of WHO and other country experts.

We went through a number of issues: from the onset of the outbreak in China to how they managed the spillover from Wuhan to other regions. They went into detail in regards to the epidemiology, clinical presentations and the treatment of COVID-19 in and out of facilities. Key lessons learnt was early screening and detection are of vital importance.

They also took us through different kinds of tests they had used and discussed efficacy and various scenarios of application.

We managed to ask very pertinent questions to elucidate key aspects and to explore our key differences, such as the fact that we have a significant TB and HIV burden. We also looked at pediatric cases, which turned out was not a major issue compared to geriatric cases with co-morbidities.

Other Matters Arising

We have approached President Cyril Ramaphosa to assist us with mobilizing reinforcements from various countries such as Cuba and China.

It is too early at this stage to say if the lockdown will be extended or lifted.

We salute our health care workers for their unwavering commitment to the cause. Here in the Western Cape, and everywhere we have been, we have found our professionals to be well informed, reading up and consulting on the matter.

We are very aware of the increased burden we face because of the upcoming flu season and are making preparations accordingly.

We have engaged the unions, COSATU and NEHAWU, on the matter of Personal Protective Equipment. We share their concerns because they raise issues relating to our own staff who are of utmost importance to us during these challenging times. We are collaborating with all local and international stakeholders to ensure that PPE continues to be manufactured and that the supply chain is not interrupted by various lockdown regulations between territories.

As always, we appeal to South Africans to continue observing the regulations of the lockdown period: stay at home, guard against diseases that come with the winter, practice good hygiene in their daily lives and stay safe.

Dr Zwelini Mkhize
Minister of Health