

REMARKS FOR MINISTER ZWELINI MKHIZE PRESS BRIEF: UPDATE ON CORONAVIRUS

31 JANUARY 2019

Good morning and thank you all for availing yourselves at such short notice.

I would like to begin by welcoming the declaration of the World Health Organisation that the Coronavirus has become a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

This sets in motion an enabling framework to ensure there is concerted multinational collaboration to detect, contain and stop the spread of Coronavirus. We accept the WHO recommendations and will tailor them to the specific needs of our country

I wish to reassure South Africans that, to date, there is no confirmed case of Coronavirus in South Africa.

We have remained vigilant on developments regarding the movements and behavior of the viral infection across the world and continue to engage the international academic fraternity to better understand how this virus behaves and its health effects.

To recap: The WHO first became aware of respiratory disease of unknown cause in Wuhan City on 31 December. On 7 January 2020, the causative pathogen was identified as a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). The Virus is believed to have originated from animals- also known as zoonotic origin. The incubation period is currently estimated to be up to 14 days. More evidence is needed to determine whether an asymptomatic carrier may contaminate another person or not. Symptoms are non-specific to the virus itself and include fever, cough, runny nose and sneezing. Occasionally, the virus can cause complications of shortness of breath, multi-organ failure and death. The evidence increasingly supports the theory that those who are most at risk are patients who have some kind of immune deficiency, whether it

be due to age or existing co-morbidity. There is no specific anti-viral and the treatment remains supportive. There is no vaccine. There is no evidence that the virus that is infecting humans has mutated since it was first detected in humans.

Yesterday, I convened a high level inter-ministerial meeting ahead of the WHO meeting in anticipation of an announcement of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The Ministries of Tourism, Police, State Security, Home Affairs and International Relations and Co-operation were all represented at the meeting and we were joined by Department of Health, and NICD officials.

This meeting sought to brief the Ministers and ultimately the President in detail on the status of Coronavirus spread and to ensure that we are prepared in all spheres to prevent the entry of Coronavirus into the country and, should there be a case detected, to respond speedily and appropriately to that eventuality.

In the last press briefing I had outlined a process of activating the Emergency Operating Centre should there be a public health emergency declaration by the WHO- that EOC was activated last night and is currently operational.

This now means that we will have dedicated staff working exclusively on Coronavirus, monitoring and responding to all reports that they will proactively detect and follow up. There will be added personnel and resources although we had already capacitated ourselves for this eventuality so we would not find ourselves wanting. The EOC is in constant communication with all relevant stakeholders and provinces.

The Multi-sectoral National Outbreak Response Team (MNORT) will reconvene straight after this press briefing at 9am to revise the Standard Operating Procedures in response to the WHO announcement

We have published a list of the dedicated centres for coronavirus.

DESIGNATED HOSPITALS FOR MANAGING 2019-nCoV CASES

Province	Designated Hospital	Designated Referral Hospital
Limpopo	Polokwane Hospital	
Mpumalanga	Rob Ferreira Hospital	
Gauteng	Charlotte Maxeke Hospital Steve Biko Hospital Thembisa Hospital	Charlotte Maxeke Hospital
KwaZulu-natal	Greys Hospital	
North West	Klerksdorp Hospital	
Free State	Pelonomi Hospital	
Northern cape	Kimberley Hospital	
Eastern Cape	Livingston Hospital	
Western Cape	Tygerberg Hospital	Tygerberg Hospital

These centres have been chosen for their ability to isolate, manage, contain and conduct research on suspected or confirmed cases of Coronavirus. This by no means suggests that other facilities do not have the ability to manage a suspected case that presents for the first time. It is simply a mechanism to ensure that we centralize co-ordination and data collection.

A 24 hour hotline for clinicians that is run by NICD continues to receive a large volume of calls which is a good sign of high vigilance amongst our health care workers.

The National Health Laboratory Service is available 24 hours a day to test for Coronavirus.

Port Health Service remains responsible for preventing, protecting and providing a public health response by monitoring the Points of Entry (PoE). Port health is responsible for early detection of suspect cases through implementation of screening measures and response to suspect case. Port health services are provided in South African ports of entry with a staff compliment of 300. Apart from distal thermal screeners, Port health officials have been provided with additional

hand held thermometers to detect the temperature of any traveller arriving into the Country.

Screening is conducted in the PoE to early detect an ill traveller through;

1. Temperature screening that is conducted in 36 PoE's utilising non-invasive thermometers where all travellers arriving through these PoE are channelled to the temperature screening. If a traveller is found to have an elevated temperature, they are assessed by a Nurse and if determined to be a suspect case they are safely transported to a health facility for further management.
2. Arriving conveyances - Health officials go onboard each arriving international aircraft and ship to determine if there is any sick traveller. If a traveller falls ill whilst onboard, port health officials are informed by the crew members in line with World Health Organization (WHO) and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) requirements and an assessment of the traveller is conducted upon arrival. If the traveller is found to exhibit symptoms consistent with novel coronavirus, the traveller would be safely transported to a medical facility for further management. Contact tracing of travellers who may have been in the proximity of a suspect traveller would be conducted to ensure those individuals are identified and investigated thoroughly.
3. As the busiest airport in Africa, special measures have been introduced in OR Tambo International Airport where travellers on direct aircraft from China and have travelled to Wuhan in the past 14 days are required to complete a questionnaire for possible contact tracing.

100% of all arriving travellers were screened in all the high risk airports since the onset of the outbreak. A total of 55 travellers were found to have an elevated temperature and referred to the Nurse for further assessment. Of the 55, 14 were from China, 1 Thailand and 40

were from non-endemic countries. No travellers were found to have symptoms consistent with current Novel Coronavirus and none required isolation.

WHO has developed and shared interim guidance for laboratory diagnosis, clinical management, infection prevention and control, home care for mildly ill patients, risk communication and community engagement. Countries, including South Africa, are using these guidance documents to revise national preparedness plans.

WHO is also working with networks of researchers and other experts to coordinate global work on surveillance, epidemiology, modelling, diagnostics, clinical care and treatment, and other ways to identify, manage and limit onward transmission of the disease. Work has commenced to develop a vaccine as soon as possible.

The National Institute of Communicable Diseases and the National Health Laboratories remain the centre of technical expertise- in the past 24 hours 14 samples have been submitted to us for investigation for Coronavirus and they all tested negative

In regard to movement and trade, we remain guided by the WHO, which has maintained its recommendations that there should be no restrictions on travel and trade.

Further, we wish to echo the sentiments of the Director General of the WHO that we are very confident in China's ability to manage the public health emergency effectively and that our citizens living in China, Hubei Province and Wuhan are in safe hands.

Consequently we maintain that there is no evidence to support repatriation or emergency evacuations of our citizens. At this stage there is no report of any South African citizen who has contracted the infection. We are aware of 2 South Africans who are currently under 14 day quarantine in Tianjin as they had moved from Wuhan to Tianjin, a neighboring municipality.

DIRCO has established a 24 hour hotline for all SA citizens living in Wuhan City to contact the SA embassy in China. The information is on the DIRCO website and social media pages. We have also requested all departments and provinces to provide a database of students and staff in China.

We did consider the full ramifications of repatriation or emergency evacuation and realized that it is very much an exercise of weighing up the risks versus the benefits. What remains a key principle is limited movement- the more we move people around the more we enable spread. We are very sensitive to the anxieties of our South African citizens and their families and wish to assure them that we are very much prepared to respond appropriately as the situation develops.

I would like to thank and applaud the Ministry of DIRCO that has been extremely proactive on the situation in China. What DIRCO has established is that there is an estimated 165 students and 54 teachers living in Wuhan and approximately 3000 students living in China. We would like to encourage all South Africans to ensure they register their presence with the South African missions in China.

Currently, a strict 14 day quarantine has been imposed in Wuhan- that is if you enter Wuhan (despite the virtual complete shutdown of public transport) you need to stay there for 14 days before you can leave, or if you intend to leave you need to wait 14 days before you can do so. This is to ensure that there is in house observation for early detection of signs or symptoms that may develop. The Chinese authorities have assured us that there is food security for those people locked inside Wuhan as logistics and food supply have not been shut down.

The Chinese Ambassador has also indicated that China has developed a new detection device specifically for Coronavirus and should South Africa have a need for such a device they can make 50 available to us upon our request. The device scans and does a blood test which can give you a result within an hour.

Both DIRCO and Department of Health are in continuous contact with the South African embassy in Beijing and the Chinese Embassy in Pretoria

The announcement of the Public Health Emergency should bring comfort and reassurance that the Coronavirus is receiving the most urgent attention by the international community and that everything is being done to protect global citizens. It should not set up a fresh wave of panic.

We remain committed to the protection of South Africans, both here and abroad and will continue to closely collaborate with the Chinese Authorities the World Health Organisation, our neighbors and the wider global community to ensure the containment of the Coronavirus