

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

26 February 2021

Dear staff and students

UPDATE: **COVID-19**

Next Friday, 05 March 2021, will mark one-year since the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in South Africa. In the 51 weeks since that announcement, more than 1.5 million people in our country have been infected and sadly, 49667 people have passed on. Family, friends and colleagues have tragically lost their lives during this pandemic. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Government has successfully commenced with the national vaccination programme. Thousands of healthcare workers have already received their vaccines. The Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize has confirmed that another 80000 Johnson & Johnson vaccines will arrive in the country tomorrow. So, until we all are vaccinated, please continue to follow the public health guidelines. Wear your mask, wash your hands and observe physical distancing protocols.

Here are the latest COVID-19 statistics for DUT:

Total number of people infected:	240	
Total number of staff (positive):	126	
Total number of students (positive):	114	
Total number of recoveries:	230	(111 students and 119 staff)
Total number of deaths:	10	(3 students and 7 staff)
Total number of active cases:	0	
Number of new infections:	0	(this week)
Number of new infections (staff):	0	(this week)
Number of new infections (students):	0	(this week)
Location of new infections: (DBN)	0	
Location of new infections: (PMB)	0	
Has contact tracing commenced:	No new cases to report	
Has physical disinfection commenced:	No new cases to report	

More than a year after the disease was identified, COVID-19 is expected to remain a challenge for the foreseeable future. Until the majority of our population has been vaccinated, and even beyond, we will need to take strict precautions to prevent ourselves and others from becoming ill, possibly seriously ill, or even dying.

Every single person has a role to play in preventing the further spread of COVID-19. One of our strongest defences is knowledge. So, what is COVID-19, and why should we take precautions?

WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an illness caused by a virus discovered in late 2019. Since then, the coronavirus has spread around the world, infecting more than 100 million people. Although many millions of people across the world have recovered, COVID-19 has unfortunately killed nearly 2.5 million people. These are frightening statistics, but there is good news: there are a few easy steps we can all take to help prevent ourselves and others from becoming infected.

HOW IS COVID-19 SPREAD?

COVID-19 is mostly spread from person to person. You can become infected by coming into close contact (about 1.5 metres or closer) with someone who is infected with the disease. When the infected person talks, laughs, shouts, coughs, sneezes or sings, they release droplets containing viruses into the air, which is when you can breathe the viruses in. Or, you could become infected by touching something previously touched by an infected person, and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?

The symptoms of COVID-19 can range from no symptoms at all (asymptomatic people) to severe illness. Common symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, loss of appetite, loss of sense of smell or taste, and body aches. In some people, COVID-19 causes more severe symptoms like high fever and shortness of breath. If you develop these severe symptoms, find help immediately (see phone numbers below). Young adults usually have a mild, flu-like illness.

WHAT IS THE NEW SOUTH AFRICAN VARIANT OF COVID-19?

All viruses naturally change over time via a process known as mutation. In South Africa, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has now mutated into a variant known as 501Y.V2. This variant is now responsible for over 90% of COVID-19 cases in the country. The problem is that this new variant spreads much more easily than the original variant, requiring even higher levels of caution.

WHO CAN GET COVID-19?

Everybody is at risk of catching COVID-19. There are, however, those who are at higher risk of developing severe illness: older persons and especially those - irrespective of age - who have other illnesses (co-morbidities) such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. That said, some younger, healthier people are becoming severely ill and even dying from COVID-19. It's not worth taking a chance: we must do everything we can to help stop COVID-19 from spreading.

A SOCIAL COMPACT FOR DUT

Recognising that preventing the spread of COVID-19 is everybody's responsibility, DUT Management has entered into a Social Compact with all stakeholders to prevent the spread of the virus by providing masks, hand sanitising, cleaning and sanitising of hands and all premises, and demarcating spaces for social distancing.

WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING COVID-19?

All members of the DUT community have the following responsibilities:

- Accept your role in preventing COVID-19;
- Strictly comply with all the guidelines and protocols;
- Encourage your fellow students and staff to comply with these guidelines; and
- **Report any symptoms of illness to DUT's health services.**

DUT MANDATORY PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

By taking the following precautions, you could save lives: your own life and the lives of your friends, your family and your fellow students. Let's take action and all be part of the solution to COVID-19.

Please do the following:

- **Keep your distance** – remain a minimum of 1.5 metres away from any other person at all times on campus and in public.
- **Wear a mask** – wear a mask that covers nose and mouth at all times on campus and in public.
- **Clean your hands** – sanitise your hands upon entering campus and continue to clean your hands regularly throughout the day. **Don't touch your face with unwashed hands.**
- **Sanitise/clean** -- clean/sanitise frequently touched surfaces.

Please avoid:

- **Avoid spaces that are closed, crowded or involve close contact.**
- Avoid crowded and poorly ventilated spaces where people spend long periods of time close together. This includes restaurants, places of worship, choir practices and other crowded situations. The virus spreads easily in these environments, so taking precautions is even more essential.

WHERE TO GET HELP IF YOU ARE ILL OR TEST POSITIVE?

- If you suspect you may be positive for COVID-19, or if you develop symptoms, please contact the DUT Clinics for assessment as you may need to leave campus immediately. The Clinics can be contacted on **031 373 2223** (Durban), **033 845 8913/8966** (Indumiso) or **033 845 8811/8812** (Riverside).
- If you live in residence, please inform your Residence Advisor immediately. They will advise you accordingly.
- Please also immediately inform your Head of Department or Lecturer.
- If you develop severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or high fever, please call the DUT Clinics as detailed above, during office hours, or dial **0600 123 456** (via WhatsApp); or the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) Hotline on **0800 029 999**; or telephone the COVID-19 National Call Centre on **012 337 1997**.

- If you get tested, please send your COVID-19 test results to your Head of Department or Lecturer for forwarding to the COVID-19 hotline on covid-enquiries@dut.ac.za
- No negative test is required for returning to campus.

WHERE TO FIND MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Many people are finding the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmingly stressful. If you need support, speaking to a trained professional can help. These services are strictly confidential.

Speak to a DUT Psychologist

To make a booking for online counselling, please email Counsbookingdbn@dut.ac.za. Otherwise, please call **031 373 2266** in Durban or **033 845 8900/8828** in the Midlands during office hours.

Online resources:

Please visit:

https://www.dut.ac.za/support_services/student_services_and_development/student_counselling_and_health/ for more information on Student Counselling and Health.

Or, for **24-hour, tollfree mental health assistance**, please call the **Higher Health national hotline** on **0800 36 36 36** or **SMS 43336**.

WHERE TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19

- Visit the DUT COVID-19 webpage at <https://www.dut.ac.za/coronavirus/> for further information.
- For enquiries and advice on COVID-19, please email the DUT COVID-19 Hotline on: covid-enquiries@dut.ac.za or call **031 373 3760 / 2223** during office hours.

In conclusion, we are pleased to confirm that there were no new reported cases of COVID-19 amongst the DUT community this week. Thank you for taking the necessary precautions and for working hard to keep our university community safe. It is extremely important for you to remember that we all have a combined responsibility to limit the

further spread of the disease. Far too many lives have already been lost in our country and around the world. The experts are already predicting a third wave in South Africa, as we get closer to mid-year, so we must remain alert and follow the public health guidelines. Please protect yourself, your loved ones and all members of the DUT community

Sincerely

DUT COVID-19 Response Task Team



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