

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

10 December 2021

COVID-19 RESPONSE TASK TEAM WEEKLY UPDATE

Dear staff and students

South Africa's daily new COVID-19 infection rates are alarmingly high. From 200 to 300 new infections daily in mid-November, new cases reached 22 391 yesterday. This is nearly the same number of daily infections recorded at the very peak of the third wave of the pandemic. Further, two weeks ago, only two percent of COVID-19 tests conducted were returning positive, while the positivity rate is now over 26 percent.

Having recorded over 90 000 deaths and more than three million infections since the beginning of the pandemic, South Africa is currently in the grips of the newly-discovered Omicron variant. While questions about this highly-mutated new variant remain to be answered, it appears that previous infection, even with the Delta variant, does not prevent infection with Omicron.

While scientists in South Africa and around the world are hard at work trying to find out critical information about the Omicron variant, we are obliged to exercise extreme caution and take all the precautions we can.

How to be safer this holiday season

Since a large number of people have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 as yet, we need to take sensible precautions to ensure that we and our loved ones remain safe now and over the coming holiday season. One of the most important steps we can take is to ensure that any room you are in is well ventilated, with air moving freely through open windows and doors. Apart from avoiding all gatherings, the safest choice is gatherings in outdoor spaces, with limited attendance. Social distancing and good hand hygiene remain vital, as do masks worn correctly, covering the nose and mouth.

Misinformation costs lives

Misinformation about COVID-19 and the vaccines continues to spread, potentially costing lives. Please find the following, this is some of the latest misinformation that is unfortunately doing the rounds.

Misinformation: ~~The COVID-19 vaccines don't work. If they did, they would stop us all from getting COVID-19.~~

Truth: Just like a number of vaccines that prevent suffering and death – including Hepatitis A and B, Measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) and many others - the COVID-19 vaccines require boosters. There is scientific evidence confirming that the booster dose strongly improves immunity, as well as preventing severe illness. The South African government has started administering booster doses to healthcare workers who participated in the Sisonke trial with the *Johnson & Johnson* vaccine. The South African Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) earlier this week approved the *Pfizer* COVID-19 booster vaccinations for people over the age of 18, six months or more after receiving the second dose of the vaccine, or 28 days later afterwards, for severely immunocompromised individuals aged 12 and older. The roll out is likely to commence early next year.

Misinformation: ~~The COVID-19 vaccines don't work. If they did, they would stop us all from getting COVID-19.~~

Truth: Research has shown that you are approximately five times less likely to catch COVID-19 if you are fully vaccinated than if you remain unvaccinated. Also, if you do get COVID-19 when you already fully vaccinated, the symptoms will probably be far less severe and you are unlikely to need hospitalisation or die. Vaccines really do save lives. Should you have concerns about getting vaccinated, or simply need more information, please email Dr Stanley Onwubu at the DUT COVID-19 Response Task Team: covid-enquiries@dut.ac.za.

Weekly COVID-19 statistics for DUT

Please note that the following COVID-19 statistics for DUT reflect a sharp increase in the number of COVID-19 positive students and staff this week. The current situation necessitates extreme caution:

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|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Total number of positive cases: | 361 |
| Total number of staff who tested positive: | 186 |
| Total number of students who tested positive: | 175 |
| Number of new cases to report: | 39 |
| Number of new cases (students): | 24 |
| Number of new cases (staff): | 15 |
| Location of new cases: | 39 in Durban & 0 in PMB |
| Number of recoveries: | 302 (Students 141 & Staff 161) |
| Total number of deaths: | 11 (staff 8 & students 3) |
| Total number of active cases: | 48 (staff 18 & students 30) |
| Has contact tracing commenced for new cases? | Yes |
| Has disinfection taken place for new cases? | Yes |

We pray for the safe return to good health for all those who are fighting the infection.

#VaccinationThursdays wraps up

DUT's #VaccinationThursdays campaign wrapped up for the year yesterday, after vaccinating hundreds of students and staff against COVID-19. Our vaccination programme will resume early next year.

Yesterday, the University issued a statement relating to the vaccination policy adopted by Council. Please familiarize yourself with the announcement and the three options open to you, by reading the [DUT Statement: Council decision on policy choices regarding the vaccination of staff and students](#).

Contact details for COVID-19 supplies at DUT

For COVID-19 PPE and services and requests, please contact the following personnel:

Face Masks - Lehlohonolo Mokhohlouloane, email: lehlohonolo@dut.ac.za

Tel: 031 373 2914 - Ntuthuko Gumede, email: NtuthukoG@dut.ac.za or call 031 373 2760.

Hand Sanitizer - Bheki Xulu, email: sydwelx@dut.ac.za or call: 031 373 6436. Mhleli Nzimakwe email: MhleliN@dut.ac.za or telephone 031 373 2245.

Venue Sanitization - Bheki Xulu, email: sydwelx@dut.ac.za or call 031 373 6436 - Praveen Singh, email: praveens@dut.ac.za or telephone 031 373 2456.

Venue Cleaning - Sanjith Dhanny, email: sanjithd@dut.ac.za or dial 031 373 2580 - Praveen Singh, email: praveens@dut.ac.za or call 031 373 2456.

In conclusion, we implore the entire DUT community to take extra care during this fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. We all want to go back to face-to-face teaching and learning, and getting vaccinated is the only way out of our current situation. If you are not already vaccinated against COVID-19, please get vaccinated as a matter of urgency.

Sincerely

DUT COVID-19 Response Task Team

#DUTGetYourJob

#DUTGettingBackToNormal