

## **Over 1.5 million engage with the Covid-19 WhatsApp Helpline** – IOL 18 March 2020

In the span of a few days, over 1.5 million South Africans engaged with the Department of Health's new Covid-19 Connect WhatsApp Helpline.

The WhatsApp helpline is aimed at delivering accurate and up-to-date information on the global pandemic and has served over 15 million messages.

Covid-19 Connect uses Turn.io technology to deliver automated responses providing answers to the most frequently asked questions about Covid-19 and the coronavirus.

Covid-19 Connect is endorsed by the Department of Health and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) and plays a vital role in supporting the Department of Health's national response.

The service does not only enable the South African government to have direct communication with the public but also empowers citizens with the right information amid the fake news and spread of misinformation.

“President Cyril Ramaphosa asked that we act together, act now and act decisively - the National Department of Health, the teams from Whatsapp and the World Health Organisation and our own teams at Praekelt.org and Turn.io have done exactly this over the last few days while developing Covid-19 Connect,” said Gustav Praekelt, Founder of Praekelt.org and co-founder of Turn.io.

Covid-19 Connect Helpline will soon be available in additional languages and is being made available to other countries and organisations to support their efforts in fighting the deadly pandemic.

The Covid-19 Connect WhatsApp number is 0600 123456. South Africans are encouraged to save the number to their contacts and send a message saying “hi” to this number.

Citizens are also encouraged to visit [www.sacoronavirus.co.za](http://www.sacoronavirus.co.za) for South Africa's official Covid-19 online news and information portal in association with The Department of Health and the NHI.