

Government is ready to turn its attention back to NHI:

Mkhize – BusinessTech 29 September 2020

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Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize says the risk of complacency amongst members of the public could become South Africa's biggest drawback and result in a second wave of Covid-19 that is more devastating than the first.

Speaking during a webinar on Tuesday (29 September) commemorating World Environmental Health Day, the health minister warned that as the country moves through alert level one, the risk of complacency amongst community members can become the biggest drawback and result in a "second wave that is more devastating than the first".

"Having witnessed a resurgence in many countries around the world currently, we must proceed with the same level of vigilance and care, understanding that the risk of being forced back into hard lockdown remains very real.

"We can never allow the virus to run rampant, causing massive loss of life, untenable strain to the health care system and wreaking environmental havoc," he said.

He said hand hygiene, social distancing, the safe handling and sale of foodstuffs, environmental cleanliness, and the management of waste and human remains are also amongst environmental interventions government is concerned with currently in the context of Covid-19 prevention and response.

"Practices that were emphasized during the Covid-19 pandemic that now form part of the new normal – such as hand washing, regular sanitization of surfaces sneeze and cough etiquette – have always been advocated by the Environmental Health fraternity.

"Covid-19 has once again reaffirmed the reality that diseases know no borders and no country is immune to the socio-economic devastation that follows the arrival and spread of a new and unfamiliar pathogen.

"The pandemic also reinforced the need for countries to pursue a more collaborative response, particularly at a regional level," he said.

National Health Insurance

Mkhize said President Cyril Ramaphosa requires that the country creates a “legacy” for the health system from the Covid-19 pandemic.

“The legacy will find expression in the National Health Insurance. As a legacy, we have to use this pandemic to ensure that environmental health systems at implementation level are strengthened for the future.

“The national norms and standards for environmental health provides an opportunity to achieve this,” he said. Mkhize said that it is vital that employers ensure adherence to the norms and standards in rendering environmental health services.

“Adequate numbers of skilled professionals must be employed and continually developed to deal with pandemics, emerging and re-emerging diseases and current environmental challenges that may have potential negative impacts on human health.”

Mkhize has previously said that before the pandemic struck, the government held many consultations where it received overwhelming support for the NHI.

“It was all about building the resilience of the healthcare sector to ensure consistent delivery of quality health care to our people. At that stage, we all agreed that any obstacles hindering collaboration between all sectors should be eliminated as we took the path to universal health coverage.”

The health minister said that the government now plans to resume its work on the NHI.

“We are all anxious to get used to Covid-19 so that we can pick up where we left off and accelerate our path towards the implementation of the National Health Insurance.

“I am convinced that we will not only prevail over Covid-19, implement the NHI and achieve Universal Health Coverage in our lifetimes, but that we will have stitched a new fabric for society – a fabric that does not compromise on alleviating poverty, preventing hunger, securing jobs and income and, overall, protecting the promise of a better life for all.”