

# WEBINAR ON DISPELLING MYTHS ABOUT VACCINES AND VARIANTS

24 February 2021  
12:00 to 14:00



science & innovation

Department:  
Science and Innovation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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SAFE**

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TOGETHER WE CAN BEAT THE CORONAVIRUS

# **Dispelling Myths About Vaccines" and "The Science of the Variant of Covid-19 and its Consequences on Society"**

## **Social and Economic Impact of Covid-19**

**Priscilla Reddy, PhD**

**Human Sciences Research Council**

# The Social Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, in the context of vaccine myths

The covid-19 pandemic has had profound social impacts on all South Africans; and this will be important in dispelling myths about covid-19 and covid-19 vaccination.

If these myths are not dealt with :

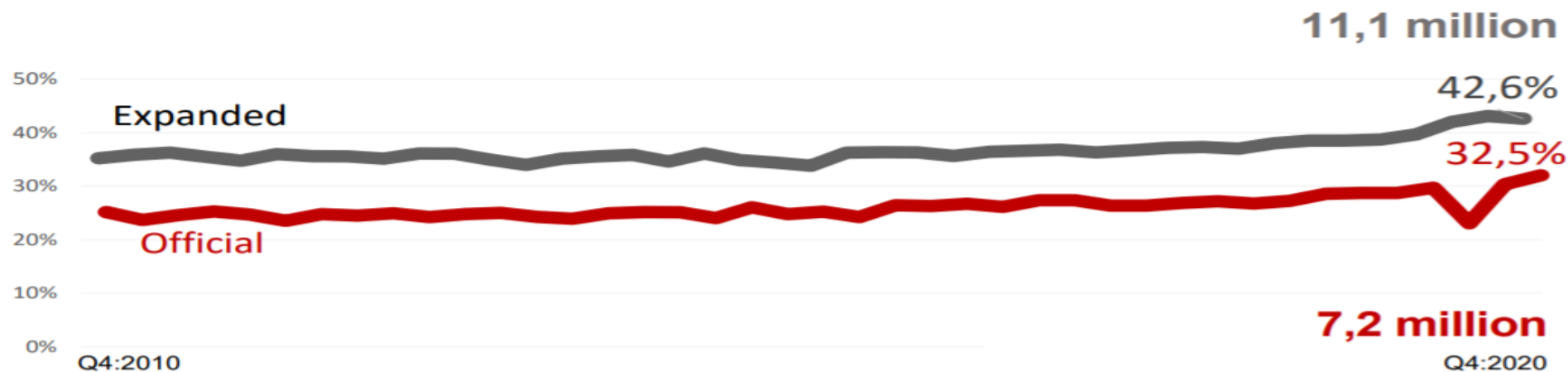
- vaccination coverage **will fall short** of the 67% of the adult population and
- the virus will continue to be **widely transmitted**
- 'covid-19 and **lockdown fatigue**' will set in with **reduced adherence** to socio behavioural interventions
- mutant strains will **continue** to develop
- **Reluctance to accept** annual covid-19 vaccinations (such as those that are given for influenza) will grow
- Health inequities will arise between those with **easier access** to annual vaccinations through their medical aid schemes, and the 83% of the population who do not have medical aid will have **lower vaccination rates**

# Synopsis of Social and Economic Impact of COVID-19

- Economic Impacts
- Individual Financial Pressures
- Food Security
- Psychological impact
- Infections, Deaths and Bereavement
- Fears, knowledge manipulation, blatant misinformation

# Economic Impacts

- During the last quarter of 2020, the official unemployment rate increased by 1.7% to **32.5%**. Highest unemployment rate to date. This translates to 7.2 million people unemployed.
- 2.2 million jobs were lost in Q2 of 2020. The economy is in recovery - some improvements were noted as more sectors opened
- Loss of income: 11% of the employed did not receive pay during lockdown in late 2020
- Salary cuts: 16.5% of those who received pay during lockdown were paid reduced salaries in Q4:2020

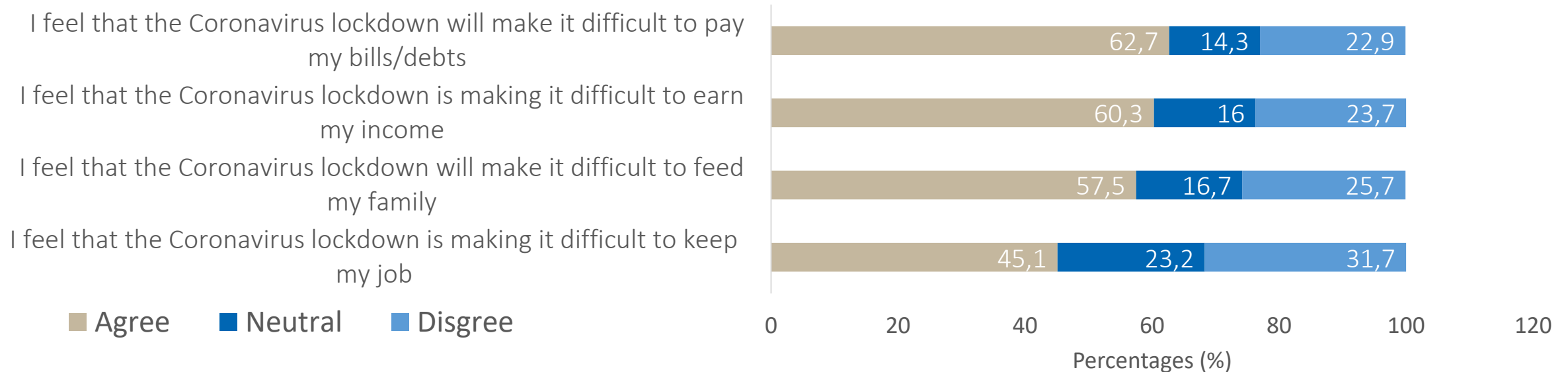


Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) Q4:2020.

[http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Presentation%20QLFS%20Q4\\_2020.pdf](http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Presentation%20QLFS%20Q4_2020.pdf)

# Individual Financial Pressures

- During early lockdown, almost 60% of South Africans were concerned about not being able to pay their expenses or support their families<sup>1</sup>. These concerns were very high among self-employed people or those employed in the informal sector.
- The situation has worsened substantially over the months, with big companies closing down, retrenchments, sustained loaning, salary reductions and escalating prices of basic food items.
  - - - > Heightened fears of job losses and pressure for breadwinners to support their families over a prolonged period



1. Human Sciences Research Council. <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/media-briefs/general/lockdown-survey-results>. April 2020.



# Food Security

- Hunger and food insecurity, which were already high prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, have worsened.
- **Almost 1 in 4 people said they do not have enough money to buy food during the first stages of lockdown in April 2020<sup>1</sup>**
- Food insecurity and child hunger improved in mid 2020 as the economy reopened, but then worsened again in October, when 41% of households reported running out of money for food<sup>2</sup>.
- **16% of households reported that a child/ren went hungry** in November-December 2020<sup>2</sup>.
- *“It has a big impact because others are unemployed, others have casual work. Since they work casually there is no food, there is nothing... No food parcels have come this side... and so people are starving and even the streets vendors had to sit with their stock until it became rotten”* (Community Health Worker, Gauteng).<sup>3</sup>

1. Human Sciences Research Council. <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/media-briefs/general/lockdown-survey-results>. April 2020.
2. Van de Berg. NIDS-CRAM Wave 3 findings: HUNGER. Presentation made on 17 February 2021.
3. Human Sciences Research Council. Street talk: Qualitative findings. 2020.

# Psychological impact

Mental health has deteriorated worldwide and in South Africa.

The distress experienced during the pandemic can be from countless reasons: Economic hardship, hunger, increases in poverty, social separation from family and friends, being confined at home, pressure on personal relationships, bereavement and loss, panic and fears about the future, education impacts, increased childcare demands, gender-based violence, lack of access to healthcare, medicines and services.

- From July-December the percentage of South Africans screening positive for depression increased **from 24% to 29%**.<sup>1</sup>
- In Nov/Dec 2020, **2 in 3 South Africans who reported experiencing hunger everyday had depressive symptoms**. This increased dramatically from July/Aug 2020,<sup>1</sup> suggesting the psychological effects of long-term/ sustained hardship during the pandemic.
- **Health care workers (HCWs), particularly nurses, reported very high rates of psychological distress**. HCWs expressed significant concerns about their families and loved ones during the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

1. Spaul et al. Synthesis Report. NIDS-CRAM Wave 3 findings. <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/1.-Spaull-N.-Daniels-R.-C-et-al.-2021-NIDS-CRAM-Wave-3-Synthesis-Report.pdf>. February 2021.

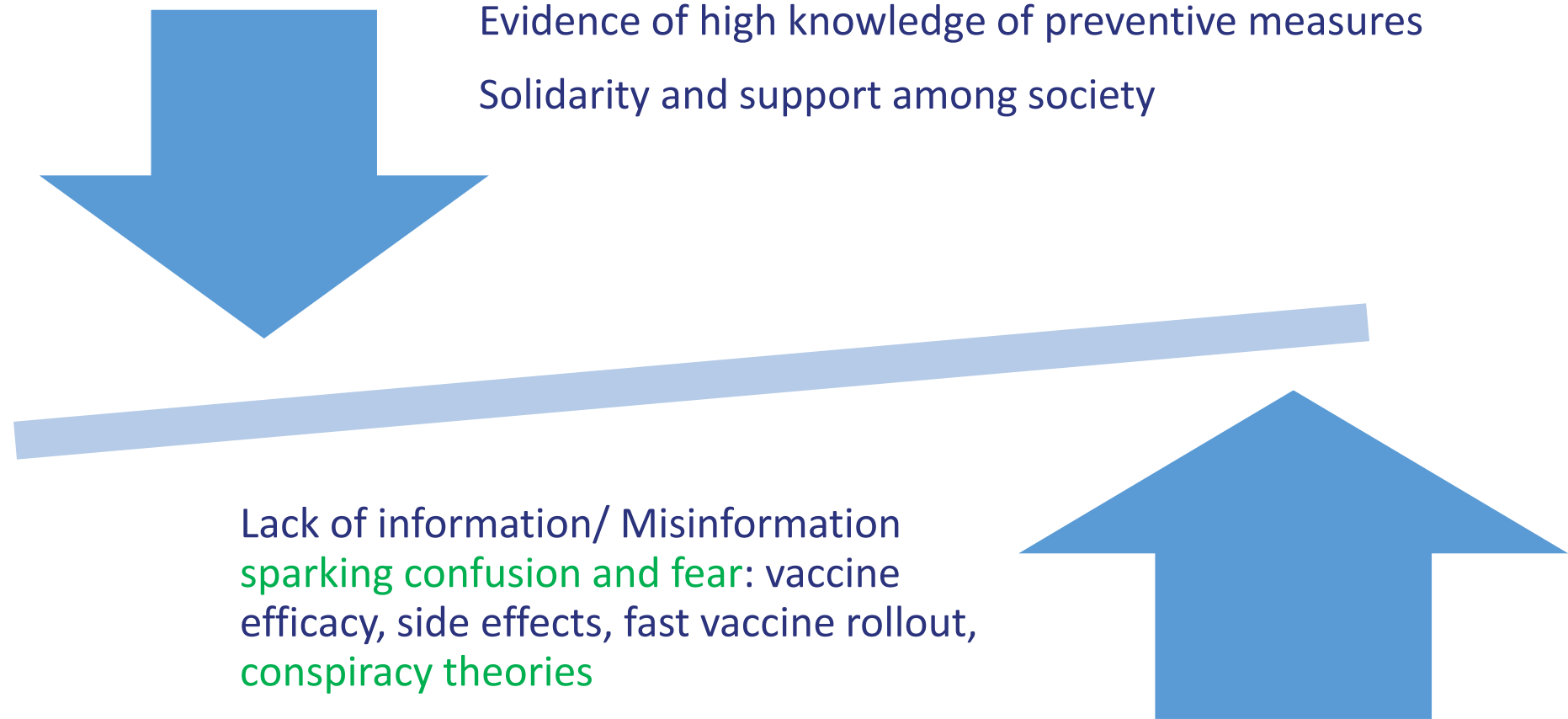
2. Human Sciences Research Council. "Frontline Talk": Health Care Worker Survey. <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/news/general/covid-19-nurses>. August 2020.



# Infections, Death and Bereavement

- To date, 1.5 million South Africans have tested positive for COVID-19, with many more having contracted the disease without testing ---> many families and individuals have been infected or know someone who has been infected, sometimes with severe outcomes and fatalities.
- Communities affected at large by COVID-19 infection either directly or indirectly
- Over the past 3-4 months, the total COVID-19 deaths more than doubled from 20,000 to 49,000
- Mourning the loss of loved ones was highly challenging as people received less in-person support, i.e. mourning in isolation.
- Limited ability to perform last rites added yet another layer of grief which resulted in prolonged grief among the bereaved and impacted their overall wellbeing.

"Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less." – Marie Curie.





# **COVID-19 Vaccines And Variants**

**Sharing knowledge and Dispelling myths**

# Dispelling Myths about Covid-19 and Vaccines

Vaccination as a method for **prevention of infectious disease** is **second only to clean water** in its public health impact

**Myths concerning vaccines** are damaging as the availability of vaccines are of no use if **people do not accept** vaccination, due to prevailing myths.

The negative aspects of vaccination get more publicity than positive aspects:

Medline search over the past five years:

Keywords **“vaccine risks”** scored **2655 hits**

**“vaccine benefits”** **557 hits**

Health education and health promotion Covid-19 vaccination strategy **is key** in addition to the logistical and health systems interventions

# Public Confidence and Trust in Social, Health and Communication Interventions

- This devastating and scary pandemic should **not be aggravated** by the types, methods and styles of information that the public are exposed to
- The public should be convinced that the purveyors of information have **their interests at heart** rather than perusing personal gains and interests
- Controversies and arguments concerning science and strategy should be **held discreetly** as this can further increase confusion, fear and breach trust
- Unclear messages from governments and health care organizations adversely affects **adherence** to lockdown measures
- Genomic data suggest that the 501Y.V2 variant first detected in South Africa has selective advantage which may relate to **increased** transmissibility
- The Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine appears to **be less effective in imparting protection** against 501Y.V2; therefore the South African Government is initiating vaccination of health care workers with the Johnson and Johnson vaccine
- **Stigma:** 501Y.V2 has been detected in 36 countries and yet South Africa has been **stigmatized** by naming 501Y.V2 the “South African Strain” in the knowledge that the corona viruses will continually **mutate in multiple locations in the World**

# Variant 501Y.V2, Socio Behavioural Interventions and Covid-19 Vaccination

Hitherto, the only effective means to control the COVID-19 pandemic have been socio-behavioural interventions:

- Face masks
- Social distancing
- Handwashing
- The use of PPE (personal protective equipment)
- Limited social gatherings

Covid-19 vaccination in South Africa began last week, with thousands of health care workers already vaccinated.

The **danger** is that, as vaccinations increase, adherence to socio behavioural interventions may weaken but these will remain key to the pandemic response until the required 67% of the population (40 million people) will be vaccinated towards the end of 2021.

**Super spreader** events such as the 'Rage' parties in Balito, KZN demonstrated that young people aged 18 to 35 years can be **super spreaders** **but** these are the last group of adults who will be vaccinated.





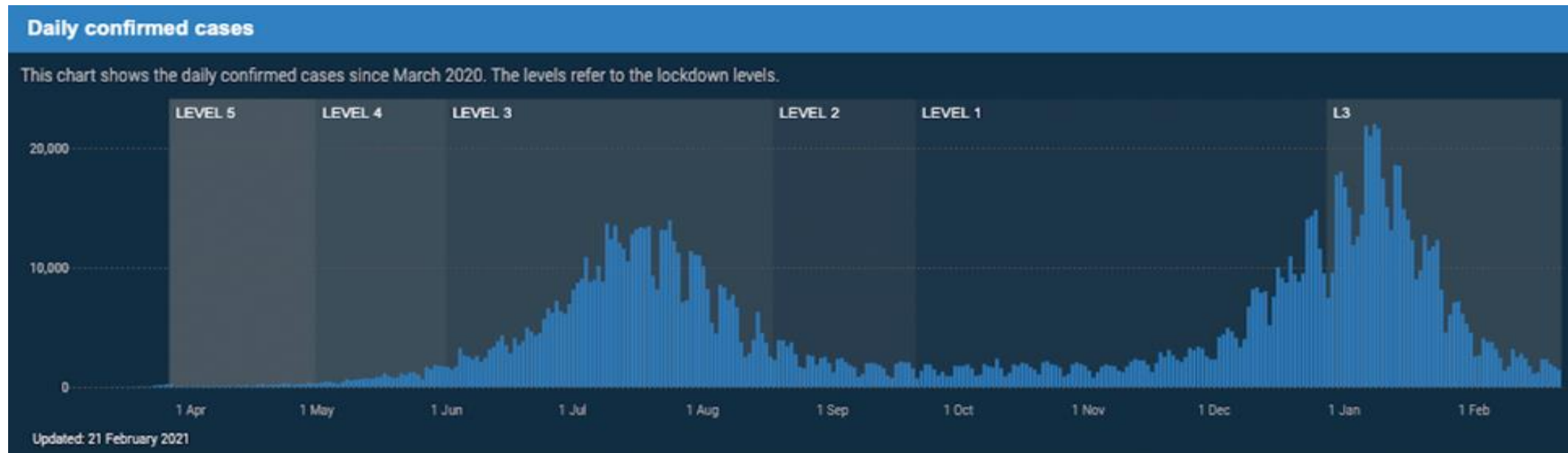
Thank You!

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact in South Africa :



And globally.

South Africa has recently experienced a second wave, with more infections, greater transmissibility and higher mortality than the first wave. A third wave is expected.



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