

Confusion reigns for Covid-infected matric pupils - Uncertainty over whether those who test positive can still write now, or must wait until June

02 November 2020 | HeraldLIVE | Author: Zamandulo Malonde

Eastern Cape education spokespersons have caused confusion regarding pupils who test positive for Covid19, with one saying they would have to write their final exams in June 2021 and another saying they will still be able to sit for the exams, starting this week.

While education MEC Fundile Gade's spokesperson, Vuyiseka Mboxela, was adamant schools had identified community halls or centres for Covid19infected pupils to write in at the same time as other pupils, to avoid the wait for June 2021 — provincial spokesperson Malibongwe Mtima said something completely different.

Mtima said pupils who tested positive would have to write their final exams in June 2021.

The exams, which start on Thursday, get under way as SA experiences a surge in new infections, raising fears of the second wave which experts and the government have warned about for months.

Nelson Mandela Bay schools recently issued a stern warning that pupils who missed any exams due to Covid19 would only write in June.

But Mboxela said 243 venues had been identified across the province.

"This is a solution proposed by some schools through their respective district directors as a way to avoid having pupils miss their exams.

"These are venues identified near the schools so that learners in isolation can write at the same time and on the same dates as other learners who will be writing in schools," Mboxela said.

She did not have a breakdown of centres per district.

Nelson Mandela Bay education district director Ernest Gorgonzola could not be reached for comment.

Mboxela's comments are in direct contradiction to those of Mtima, who confirmed 25 pupils had missed the CAT paper 1 practical exam on October 21.

This, he said, was in line with the education department's official Covid19 standard protocol document to prevent and manage the spread of the virus in schools.

Mtima said: "All officials and learners that contract Covid19 must isolate to protect other people.

"Learners who contract Covid19 are not allowed to write exams, to protect others.

"They too cannot write exams in quarantine sites as trained invigilators need to be deployed to those places."

According to a department of basic education guidelines document, sent to schools to guide

them for the final exams, pupils who test positive for Covid19 are required to isolate for 10 days before returning to school.

If they are admitted to hospital, they may return to school eight days after being discharged and when they are well enough.

Repeat testing or a doctor's letter of fitness are not required before returning to school.

Pupils or staff who have been in close contact with an infected person are required to quarantine for 14 days and be tested should they display symptoms consistent with the virus while in isolation.

But all distant contacts are to continue attending school.

All pupils and staff will be screened for Covid19 symptoms daily in line with the National Institute for Communicable Diseases screening process.

Pupils and staff who appear ill or display symptoms compatible with Covid19 upon screening are required to isolate, seek testing and return to school 10 days after a positive test and once they have no Covid19 symptoms.

Some Bay school principals contacted by The Herald were of the collective notion that pupils who contracted the virus and missed exams would write in 2021.

They were unaware that the option to identify venues specifically for Covid19 cases existed.

Riebeek College Girls' High School principal Kieran Stear said they were not aware of the option to have Covid19positive pupils write in one venue.

"It is possible that we will receive information on this when we return to school on November 2 after the weeklong holiday," she said.

"The department did request that each school identify an alternative venue for their learners to write in should there be the need for sanitisation of the venue being used due to a Covid19positive test among the learners."

Woodridge College principal Derek Bradley said the school would cater for isolated pupils who had been in contact with an infected person but were fit to write their exams.

"For those who come into contact with an infected person, they would be isolated and if they were well enough to continue writing their exams, we would facilitate this in a designated isolation venue," Bradley said.

HeraldLIVE

Caption:

FINAL COUNTDOWN **Matric** final exams commence on Thursday