

## Lock down the entire province, Mkhize urged during Kouga visit

The Herald (South Africa) | 10 Dec 2020 | Zipo-zenkosi Ncokazi ncokaziz@theherald.co.za

To stop the spread of Covid-19 in the Eastern Cape, inter-town travel should be forbidden, alcohol sales reduced to takeaways and the curfew should start at 10pm throughout the province.

There should also be more police visibility at taxi ranks to enforce the adherence to regulations.

These are some of the suggestions that were made to health minister Dr Zweli Mkhize yesterday by a funeral parlour owner, a representative from Distell and Kouga ward councillors.

Mkhize visited Kouga after President Cyril Ramaphosa identified Nelson Mandela Bay as a Covid-19 hotspot in SA and raised concerns about the rising number of cases in Sarah Baartman.

Tougher restrictions have since been put in place in the Bay, which includes the curfew starting at 10pm and alcohol sales only allowed from Monday to Thursday.

The Sarah Baartman district has recorded 15,853 cases, of which 14,338 have recovered and 395 people have died from coronavirus complications.

Funeral parlour owner and business forum representative Dean Gilbert said since the tougher restrictions imposed in the Bay, there had been an influx of people to the Kouga municipality.

Local taverns and liquor outlets were being overrun, he said. "There should not be inter-town travel — lock down the entire Eastern Cape, all we need is 14 days to lock this down.

"It sounds drastic, but drastic steps are needed because if we allow people from other provinces in and out then our hospitals will be in trouble," Gilbert said.

Kouga municipality ANC councillor and chief whip Malibongwe Dayimani recommended that the same restrictions in place in the Bay should also apply in Jeffreys Bay and Humansdorp.

He said the taxi industry also needed to be urged by law enforcement agencies to adhere to the Covid-19 regulations.

"I have observed in taxis and at the ranks how drivers are not wearing masks and not sanitising the passengers, and if their compliance is not monitored passengers are at risk and the spread will continue to rise."

Distell representative Mbulelo Sibiyi said they had programmes that encouraged outlets and customers to adhere to regulations.

He said law enforcement agencies should identify the businesses that did not adhere to the regulations so that those who complied would not be punished.

Mkhize said he would present the recommendations to the national command council today.

"If we are going to control the spillage of people from other towns, we will have to look at standardised restrictions for these areas because the Garden Route, Sarah Baartman and NMB are so close to each other.

"That 's why people from NMB are coming here for enjoyment, and that really has been a challenge we have also observed," Mkhize said.

After the various engage

ments, Mkhize did a quick tour of the Kouga Partnership Hospital in Humansdorp, where he was shown the different units set up to handle Covid-19 cases.

Meanwhile, DA MPL Jane Cowley said the statistics were neither accurate nor consistent.

She said on Monday the Eastern Cape epidemiological report indicated that between Saturday and Sunday no Covid19 deaths had been reported.

“On Tuesday, however, the National Institute of Communicable Diseases stated that the Eastern Cape had suffered a further 82 Covid-19 related deaths. How is it possible that in one 24-hour period, nobody is reported as having died, and then in the next 24 hours, 82 people had succumbed?”

Provincial health spokesperson Sizwe Kupelo said: “There is a process to verify if the deaths are indeed Covid-19 related.

“It has got absolutely nothing to do with the suspicions by political parties that we are hiding numbers, we cannot do that.

“We have been transparent about this pandemic.

“It is just a question of trying to verify the deaths before we update the media.”

The Eastern Cape also overtook Gauteng as the province with more Covid-19 deaths.

On Tuesday night, the total number of people who had died from the coronavirus in the Eastern Cape stood at 5,060, while in Gauteng the number stood at 5,053.

Nationally, 22,432 people had succumbed to the virus.