

COVID-19 TESTING SUMMARY



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Division of the National Health Laboratory Service

SOUTH AFRICA WEEK 49 2021

OVERVIEW OF REPORT

This report summarises national laboratory testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19, in South Africa. This report is based on data for specimens reported up to 11 December 2021 (Week 49 of 2021).

HIGHLIGHTS

- The number of tests reported in week 49 of 2021 (n=437,818) was higher than the number of tests reported since early July 2021.
- In week 49 the testing rate was highest in Gauteng (1264 per 100,000 persons) and lowest in Limpopo (226 per 100,000 persons).
- In week 49 the percentage testing positive was 35.5%, which was 9.4% higher than the previous week.
- In week 49 compared to the previous week, the percentage testing positive increased in all provinces.
- The percentage testing positive in week 49 was highest in the North West Province (44.3%), followed by Limpopo (43.8%) and Mpumalanga (41.5%) provinces. The percentage testing positive was between 30 – 40% in Gauteng, Free State and Kwa-Zulu Natal, and was less than 30% in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape provinces.

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Executive Summary:

- In the period 1 March 2020 through 11 December 2021, 20,129,595 tests for SARS-CoV-2 have been reported nationally: 17,149,571 PCR and 2,980,024 antigen tests.
- The number of tests reported in week 49 of 2021 (n=437,818: 339,611 PCR and 98,207 antigen tests) was higher than the number of tests reported since early July 2021.
- Gauteng reported the largest proportion of tests (44.7%), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (16.7%) and Western Cape (13.8%).
- The overall testing rate increased from 616 per 100,000 persons in week 48 to 734 per 100,000 persons in week 49.
- In week 49 the testing rate increased in all provinces, and most notably in the Western Cape (660 per 100 000 in week 48 to 860 per 100,000 in week 49). The testing rate was highest in Gauteng (1264 per 100,000 persons) and lowest in Limpopo (226 per 100,000 persons).
- The testing rate in week 49 was highest in the 50-54 years age group (1181 per 100,000 persons).
- In week 49 the percentage testing positive was 35.5%, which was 9.4% higher than the previous week ($P<0.001$).
- In the past week, the percentage testing positive increased by 11.4% in the public sector (26.6% in week 48 to 38.0% in week 49, $P<0.001$) and by 8.1% in the private sector (25.7% in week 48 to 33.8% in week 49, $P<0.001$).
- In week 49, compared to the previous week, the percentage testing positive increased in all provinces, with increases greater than 20% observed in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.
- The percentage testing positive in week 49 was highest in the North West Province (44.3%), followed by Limpopo (43.8%) and Mpumalanga (41.5%) provinces. The percentage testing positive was between 30 – 40% in Gauteng, Free State and Kwa-Zulu Natal, and was less than 30% in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape provinces.
- The highest percentage testing positive was observed in the age groups 10-14 years (40.3%) and 25-29 years (40.2%).
- Health sub-districts showing the highest percentage testing positive were concentrated in Mpumalanga (n=6), followed by Gauteng (n=5) and North West (n=5) in the past week.
- Antigen tests accounted for 22.4% (98,207/437,818) of tests reported in week 49, however the number of antigen tests is likely underestimated due to under-reporting and delayed reporting of antigen tests.
- In week 49 the public sector accounted for 70.7% of antigen tests reported. The majority of antigen tests have been reported from KwaZulu-Natal (31.8%) and Gauteng (20.3%) provinces. A slight decrease in reported antigen tests was observed in Gauteng in the past week, and notable increases were observed in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.
- The mean turnaround time for PCR tests reported in week 49 was 1.0 days; 1.9 days in the public sector and 0.7 days in the private sector. Turnaround times for public sector PCR tests increased in all provinces in the past week and were >2 days in Gauteng.
- The mean turnaround time for antigen tests reported in week 49 was 3.4 days in the public sector and 0.2 days in the private sector.

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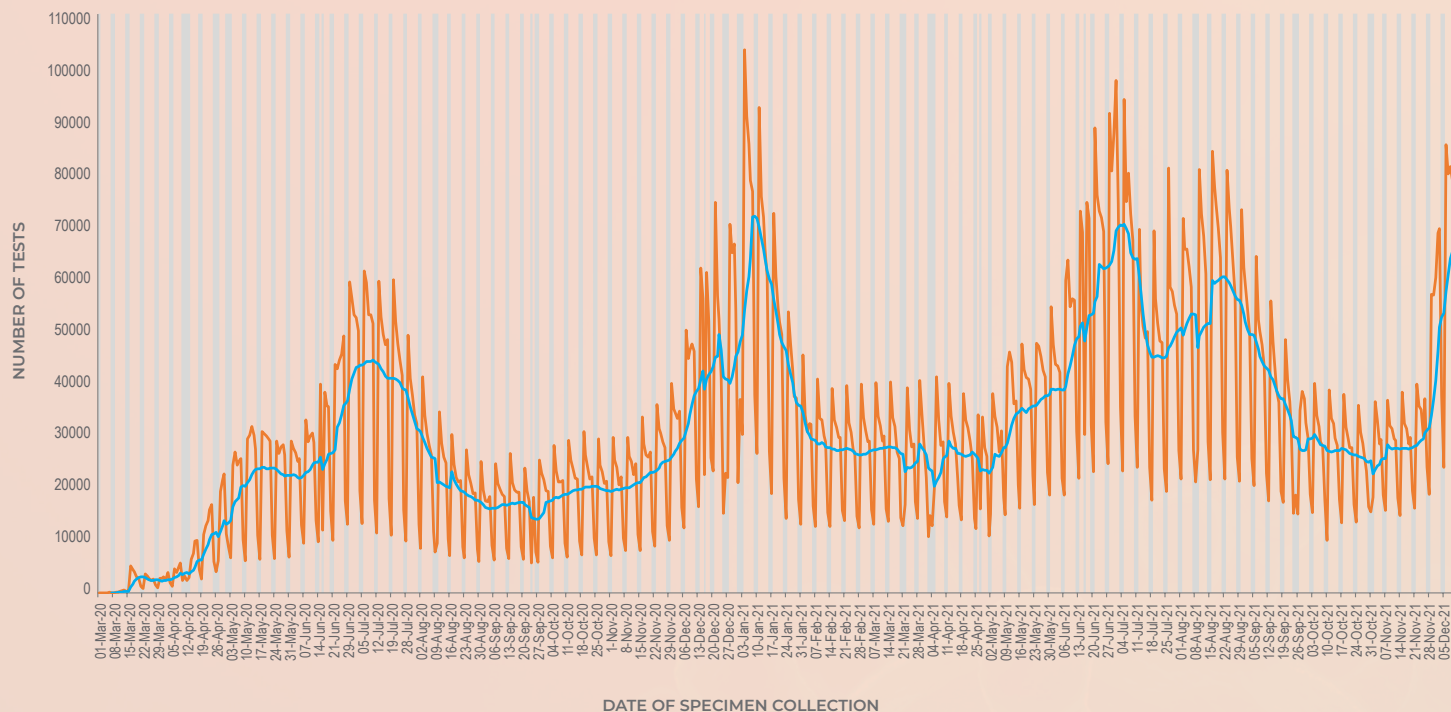


Figure 1. Number of SARS-CoV-2 tests reported by date of specimen collection, South Africa, 1 March 2020 – 11 December 2021. Blue line shows the 7-day moving average of the number of tests reported. Grey bars highlight weekend days and public holidays

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Table 1. Weekly number of SARS-CoV-2 tests and positive tests reported, South Africa, 3 January – 11 December 2021

Week number	Week beginning	No. of tests n (%)	No. of positive tests	Percentage testing positive (%)
1	03-Jan-21	501298 (2.5)	151048	30.1
2	10-Jan-21	418042 (2.1)	104804	25.1
3	17-Jan-21	327469 (1.6)	63266	19.3
4	24-Jan-21	249588 (1.2)	34643	13.9
5	31-Jan-21	203755 (1.0)	22370	11.0
6	07-Feb-21	193312 (1.0)	16472	8.5
7	14-Feb-21	190667 (0.9)	12187	6.4
8	21-Feb-21	184705 (0.9)	10385	5.6
9	28-Feb-21	189711 (0.9)	8691	4.6
10	07-Mar-21	193440 (1.0)	8339	4.3
11	14-Mar-21	185519 (0.9)	8153	4.4
12	21-Mar-21	173266 (0.9)	7354	4.2
13	28-Mar-21	163966 (0.8)	7062	4.3
14	04-Apr-21	180868 (0.9)	7291	4.0
15	11-Apr-21	185327 (0.9)	8845	4.8
16	18-Apr-21	184892 (0.9)	9468	5.1
17	25-Apr-21	159996 (0.8)	9180	5.7
18	02-May-21	193926 (1.0)	13459	6.9
19	09-May-21	240268 (1.2)	19935	8.3
20	16-May-21	248478 (1.2)	24212	9.7
21	23-May-21	262569 (1.3)	29773	11.3
22	30-May-21	270249 (1.3)	36102	13.4
23	06-Jun-21	337776 (1.7)	59445	17.6
24	13-Jun-21	370444 (1.8)	87937	23.7
25	20-Jun-21	432030 (2.1)	118488	27.4
26	27-Jun-21	489586 (2.4)	146543	29.9
27	04-Jul-21	443551 (2.2)	141381	31.9
28	11-Jul-21	320431 (1.6)	100881	31.5
29	18-Jul-21	312749 (1.6)	88357	28.3
30	25-Jul-21	350079 (1.7)	88217	25.2
31	01-Aug-21	370752 (1.8)	87991	23.7
32	08-Aug-21	358052 (1.8)	83254	23.3
33	15-Aug-21	420109 (2.1)	95233	22.7
34	22-Aug-21	390297 (1.9)	78056	20.0
35	29-Aug-21	343573 (1.7)	54975	16.0
36	05-Sep-21	299027 (1.5)	38760	13.0
37	12-Sep-21	258751 (1.3)	23972	9.3
38	19-Sep-21	207282 (1.0)	13973	6.7
39	26-Sep-21	205493 (1.0)	9455	4.6
40	03-Oct-21	195014 (1.0)	6430	3.3
41	10-Oct-21	189323 (0.9)	4998	2.6
42	17-Oct-21	184175 (0.9)	3393	1.8
43	24-Oct-21	174190 (0.9)	2545	1.5
44	31-Oct-21	178918 (0.9)	2079	1.2
45	07-Nov-21	192115 (1.0)	2263	1.2
46	14-Nov-21	193761 (1.0)	4741	2.4
47	21-Nov-21	216915 (1.1)	18775	8.7
48	28-Nov-21	367113 (1.8)	95639	26.1
49	05-Dec-21	437818 (2.2)	155232	35.5
Total		20,129,595 (100.0)	3,410,973	

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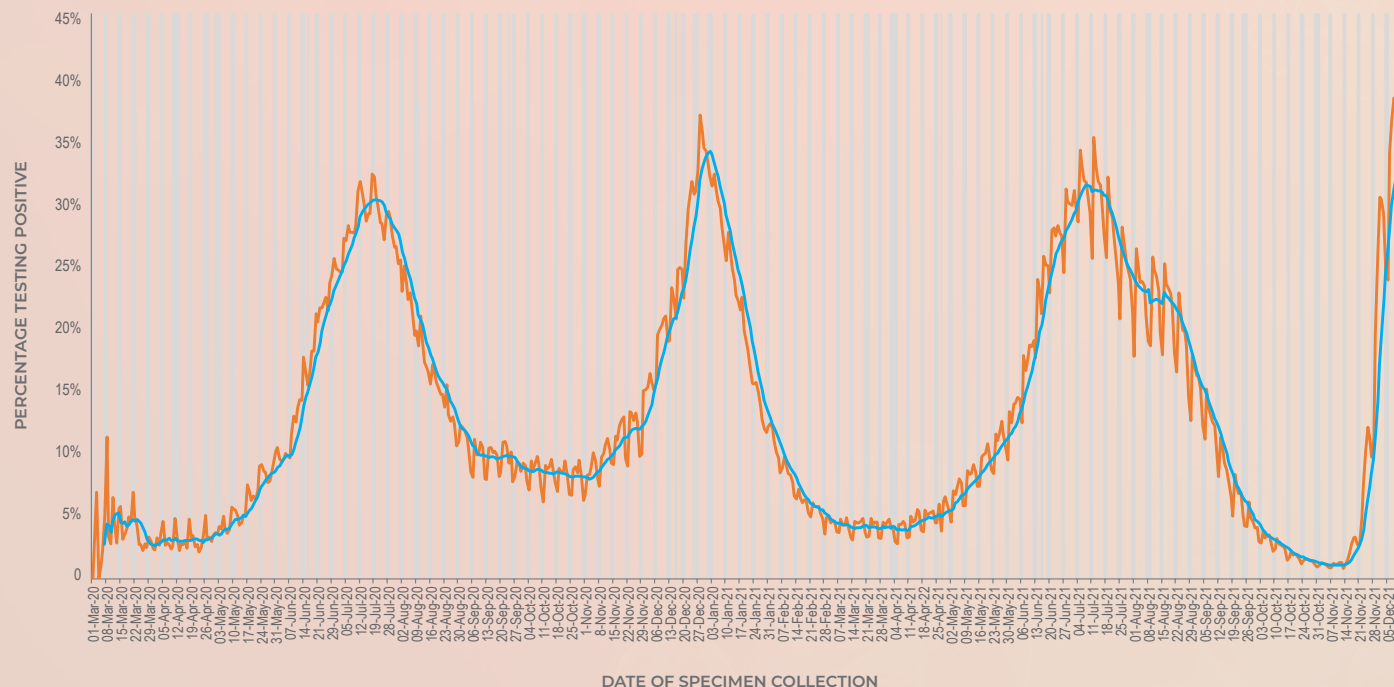


Figure 2. Percentage of tests positive for SARS-CoV-2 by date of specimen collection, South Africa, 1 March 2020 – 11 December 2021. Blue line shows the 7-day moving average of the percentage testing positive. Grey bars highlight weekend days and public holidays.

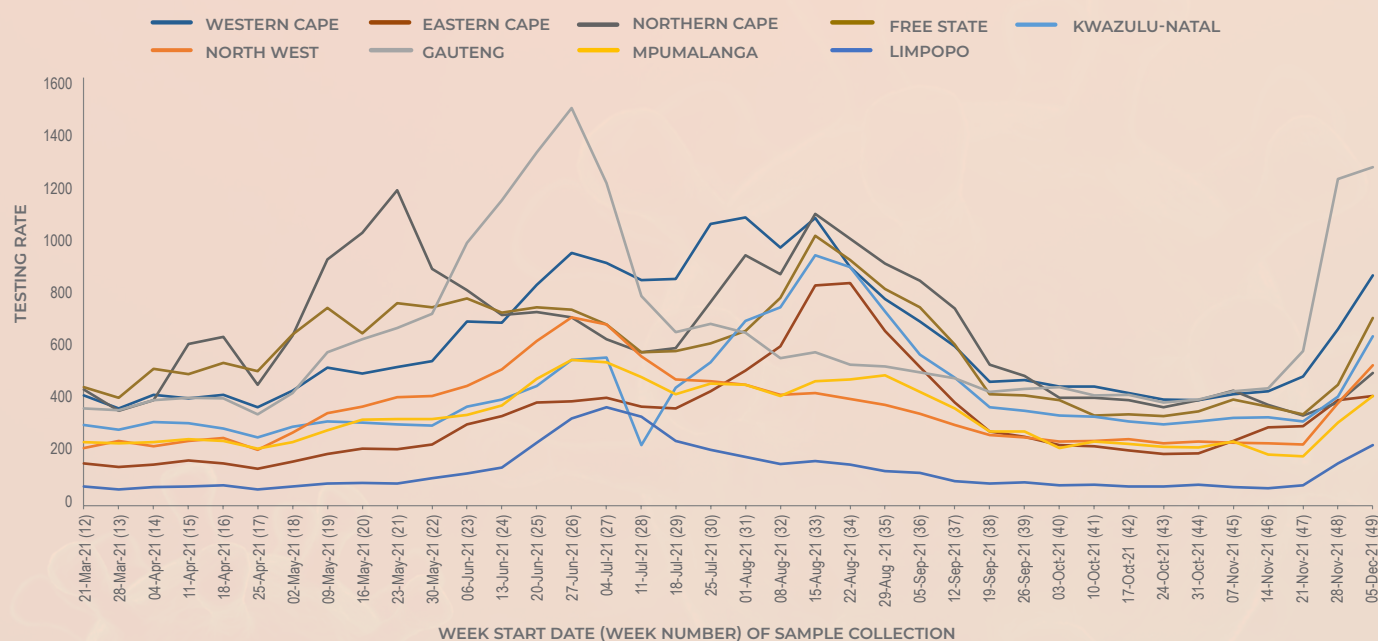


Figure 3. Testing rate per 100,000 persons by province and week of specimen collection, South Africa, 21 March 2021 – 11 December 2021

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Table 2. Weekly number of tests and positive tests reported by province, South Africa, 21 November – 11 December 2021

Province	Population ^a	21-27 Nov 2021		28 Nov – 4 Dec 2021		5-11 Dec 2021		Tests per 100,000 persons	Change in percentage positive ^b
		No. of tests	No. positive tests (%)	No. of tests	No. positive tests (%)	No. of tests	No. positive tests (%)		
Western Cape	7005741	33878	928 (2.7)	46253	6137 (13.3)	60270	16517 (27.4)	860	14.1%
Eastern Cape	6734001	20000	202 (1.0)	26608	1545 (5.8)	27591	7070 (25.6)	410	19.8%
Northern Cape	1292786	4356	193 (4.4)	4985	500 (10.0)	6409	1770 (27.6)	496	17.6%
Free State	2928903	10000	255 (2.6)	13227	1890 (14.3)	20548	7633 (37.1)	702	22.9%
KwaZulu-Natal	11531628	36437	631 (1.7)	47141	5382 (11.4)	73080	23159 (31.7)	634	20.3%
North West	4108816	9442	771 (8.2)	15741	4327 (27.5)	21583	9555 (44.3)	525	16.8%
Gauteng	15488137	89618	14811 (16.5)	189027	68772 (36.4)	195838	75739 (38.7)	1264	2.3%
Mpumalanga	4679786	8647	510 (5.9)	14527	3994 (27.5)	19235	7991 (41.5)	411	14.1%
Limpopo	5852553	4503	472 (10.5)	9314	3087 (33.1)	13207	5785 (43.8)	226	10.7%
Unknown		34	2 (5.9)	290	5 (1.7)	57	13 (22.8)		
Total	59622350	216915	18775 (8.7)	367113	95639 (26.1)	437818	155232 (35.5)	734	9.4%

^a 2020 Mid-year population Statistics SA

^b Current week compared to previous week

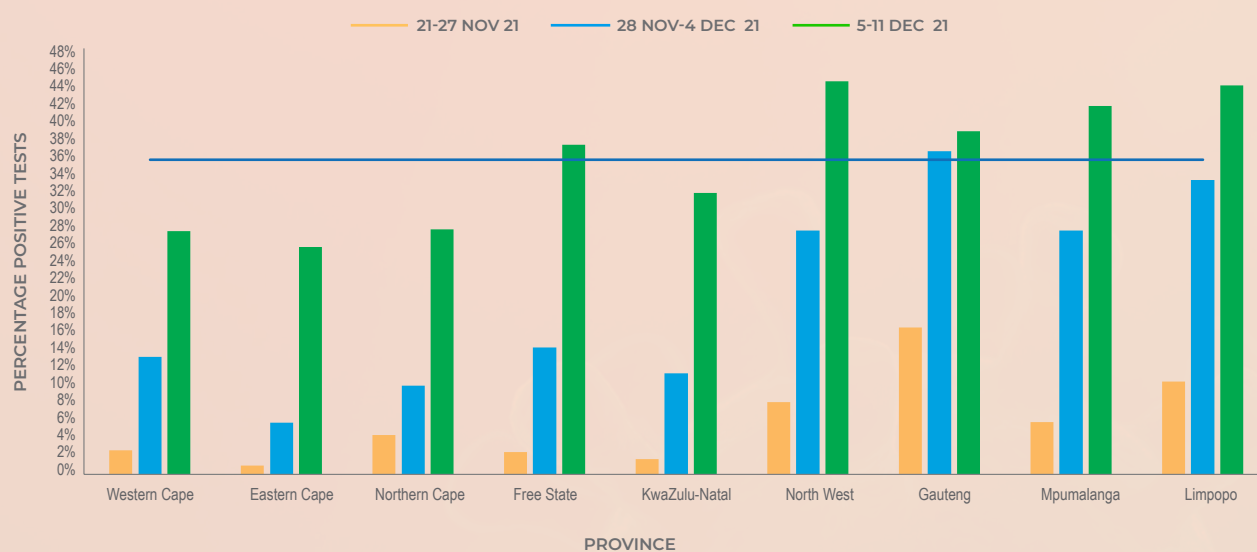


Figure 4. Weekly percentage testing positive by province, South Africa, 21 November – 11 December 2021. The horizontal blue line shows the national mean for week 49, beginning 5 December 2021

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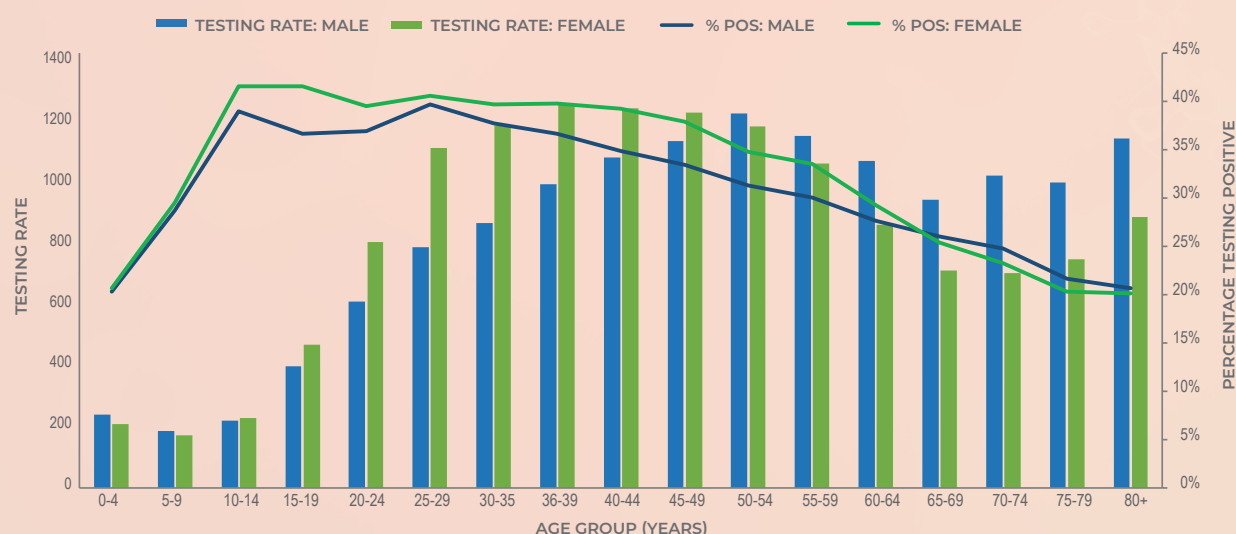


Figure 5. Testing rates per 100,000 persons and percentage testing positive by age group and sex, South Africa, week 49, 5 – 11 December 2021

Table 3. Health sub-districts with the highest proportion testing positive based on public and private sector data for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021

Health district or sub-district	Province	PTP (95% CI)	Previous week
Tswaing	North West	0.815 (0.671-0.960)	...
Thembelihle	Northern Cape	0.752 (0.619-0.885)	...
Greater Taung	North West	0.715 (0.620-0.809)	0.176 (0.071-0.282)
Letsemeng	Free State	0.706 (0.625-0.787)	0.634 (0.500-0.767)
Ratlou	North West	0.674 (0.527-0.820)	...
Victor Khanye	Mpumalanga	0.673 (0.585-0.760)	0.547 (0.452-0.641)
Ventersdorp	North West	0.658 (0.573-0.743)	0.491 (0.342-0.640)
Westonaria	Gauteng	0.653 (0.584-0.722)	0.438 (0.330-0.545)
Phokwane	Northern Cape	0.650 (0.569-0.731)	0.488 (0.364-0.611)
Dipaleseng	Mpumalanga	0.632 (0.517-0.746)	...
Randfontein	Gauteng	0.622 (0.601-0.643)	0.606 (0.582-0.630)
Thembisile	Mpumalanga	0.621 (0.578-0.664)	0.468 (0.421-0.516)
Dr JS Moroka	Mpumalanga	0.614 (0.568-0.661)	0.565 (0.517-0.613)
Ramotshere Moiloa	North West	0.597 (0.541-0.653)	0.294 (0.231-0.358)
Tshwane 5	Gauteng	0.579 (0.545-0.613)	0.655 (0.617-0.692)
Mkhambathini	KwaZulu-Natal	0.574 (0.437-0.711)	0.112 (0.000-0.231)
Ngwathe	Free State	0.574 (0.502-0.645)	0.305 (0.190-0.421)
Lekwa	Mpumalanga	0.566 (0.519-0.613)	0.312 (0.259-0.365)
Emakhazeni	Mpumalanga	0.564 (0.481-0.646)	0.392 (0.286-0.498)
Tshwane 7	Gauteng	0.561 (0.521-0.600)	0.573 (0.530-0.616)
Lepele-Nkumpi	Limpopo	0.531 (0.470-0.592)	0.498 (0.426-0.570)
Moghaka	Free State	0.524 (0.485-0.563)	0.146 (0.101-0.190)
Mogalakwena	Limpopo	0.520 (0.481-0.560)	0.370 (0.331-0.409)
Mthonjaneni	KwaZulu-Natal	0.516 (0.379-0.653)	0.096 (0.000-0.223)
Johannesburg G	Gauteng	0.515 (0.498-0.531)	0.480 (0.461-0.499)

95% CI: 95% confidence interval; PTP: adjusted positive test proportion; Elements marked in red have current week proportions testing positive that are higher than, and CIs that do not overlap with, the previous week proportions and CIs. Elements marked in blue have current week proportions testing positive that are lower than, and CIs that do not overlap with, the previous week proportions and CIs.

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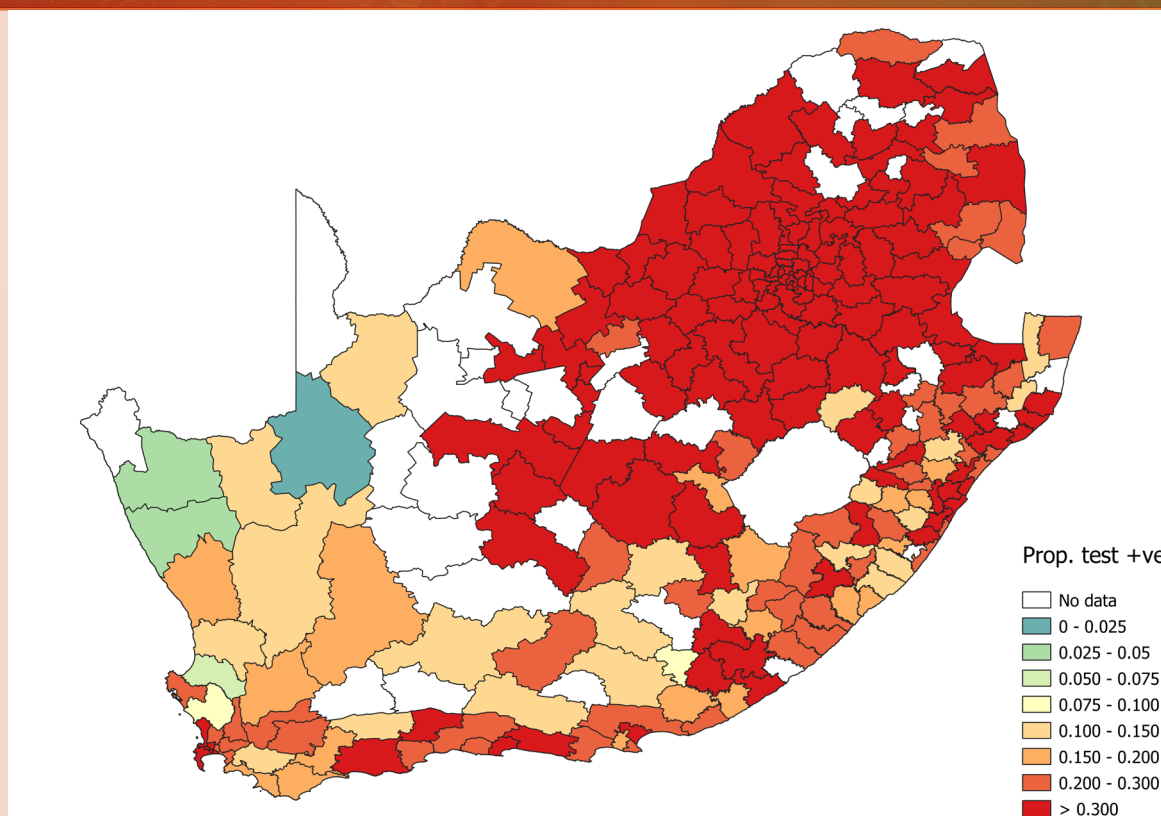


Figure 6. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in South Africa for the week of 5-11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

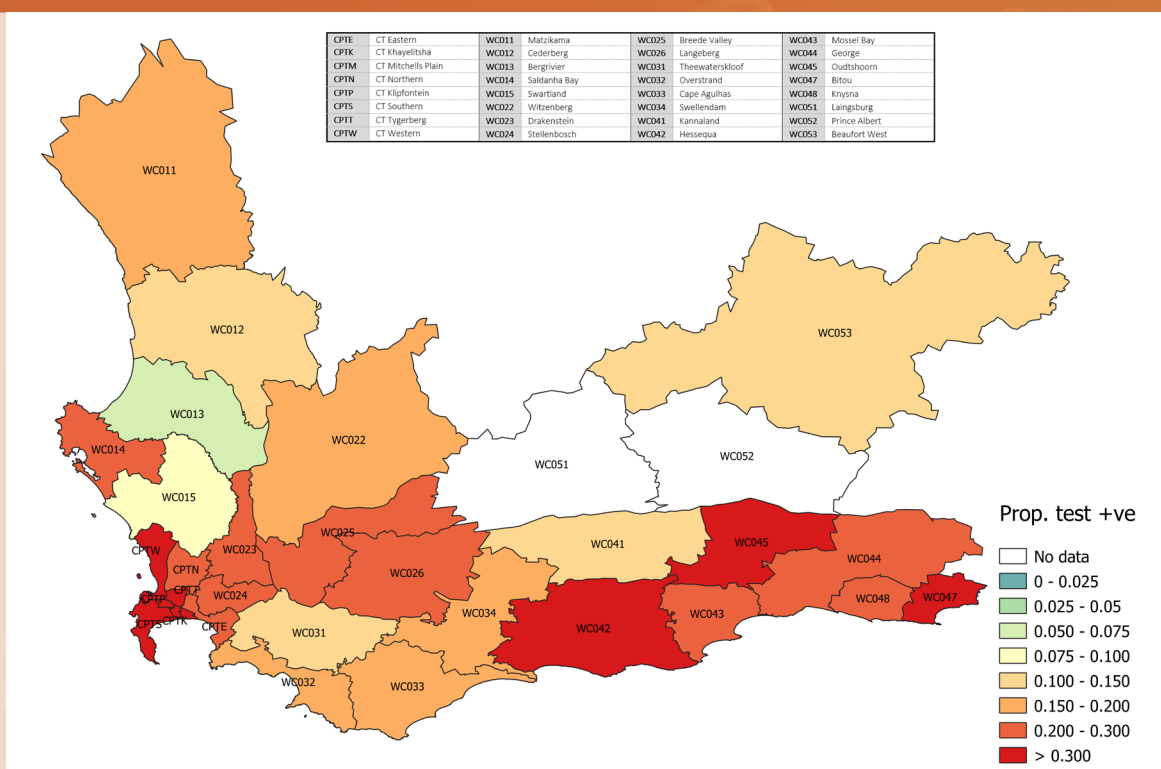


Figure 7. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in the Western Cape Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%

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BUF	Buffalo City	EC122	Mnguma	EC135	Intshika Yethu	EC155	Nyandeni
EC101	Camdeboo	EC123	Great Kail	EC136	Emalahleni	EC156	Mlontlo
EC102	Blue Crane Route	EC124	Amahlathi	EC137	Engcobo	EC157	King Sabata Dalindyebo
EC103	Ikwezi	EC126	Ngushwa	EC138	Sakhisizwe	EC441	Matatiele
EC104	Makana	EC127	Nkonkobe	EC141	Elundini	EC442	Umtzimvubu
EC105	Ndlambe	EC128	Nxuba	EC142	Senqu	EC443	Mbizana
EC106	Sundays River Valley	EC131	Inxuba Yethemba	EC143	Maletswai	EC444	Ntabankulu
EC107	Baviaans	EC132	Tsolwana	EC144	Gariep	NMAA	Nelson Mandela Bay A
EC108	Kougi	EC133	Inkwanca	EC153	Nqunza Hill	NMAB	Nelson Mandela Bay B
EC109	Kou-Kamma	EC134	Lukangji	EC154	Port St Johns	NMAC	Nelson Mandela Bay C
EC121	Mbashe						

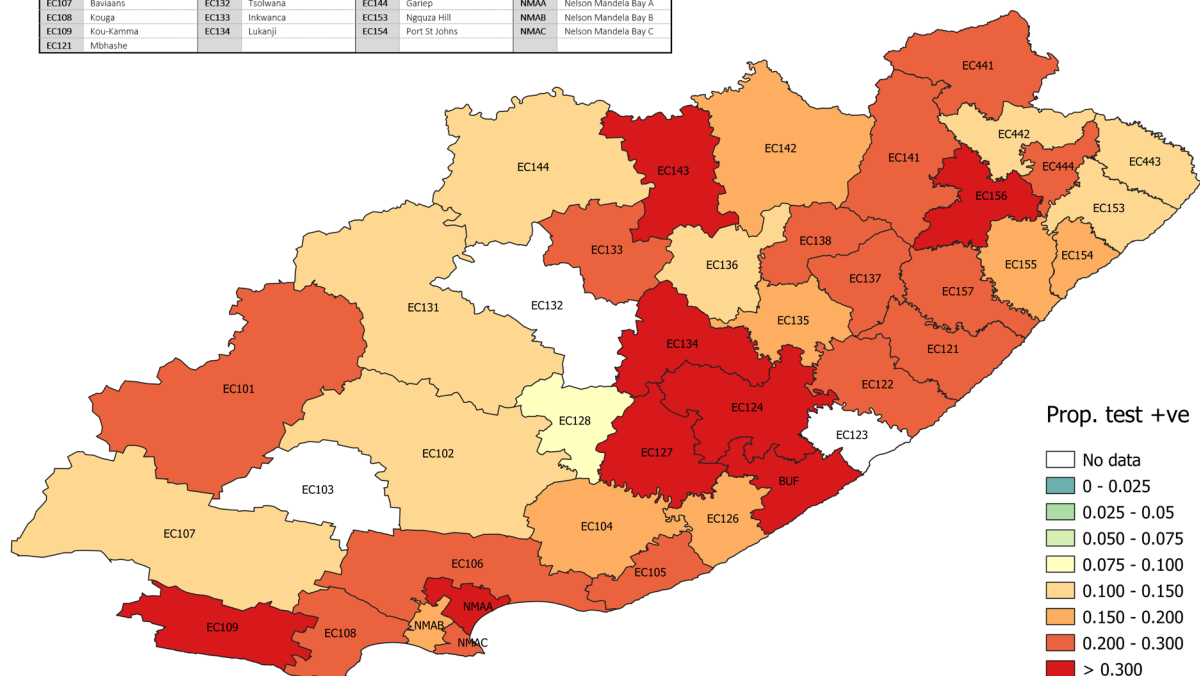


Figure 8. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in the Eastern Cape Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

NC061	Richtersveld	NC074	Kareeberg	NC085	Tsantsabane
NC062	Nama Khoi	NC075	Renosterberg	NC086	Igatlopoie
NC064	Kamiesberg	NC076	Themboshele	NC091	Sol Plaatje
NC065	Hantam	NC077	Siyathamba	NC092	Dikgatlong
NC066	Karoo Hoogland	NC078	Siyancuma	NC093	Magareng
NC067	Kha-Ma	NC081	Miller	NC094	Phokwane
NC071	Uburu	NC082	Kai Garib	NC451	Joe Morolong
NC072	Umsobomvu	NC083	//Khaas Hais	NC452	Ga-Segonyana
NC073	Enthangeni	NC084	Ikheis	NC453	Gamagara

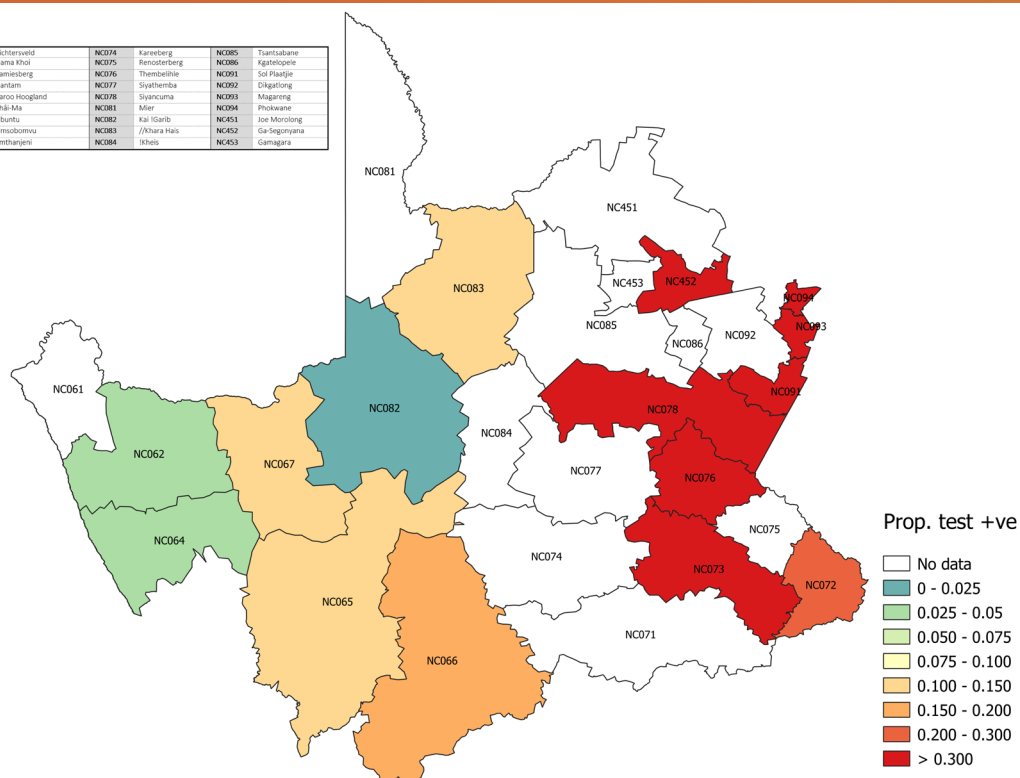


Figure 9. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in Northern Cape Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

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MAN	Mangaung	FS181	Masilonyana	FS191	Setsoto	FS196	Mantsope
FS161	Letsemeng	FS182	Tokologo	FS192	Dihlabeng	FS201	Moghaka
FS162	Kopanong	FS183	Tswelopele	FS193	Nketoana	FS203	Ngwathe
FS163	Mohokare	FS184	Matjhabeng	FS194	Maluti a Phofung	FS204	Metsimaholo
FS164	Naledi	FS185	Nala	FS195	Phumelela	FS205	Mafube

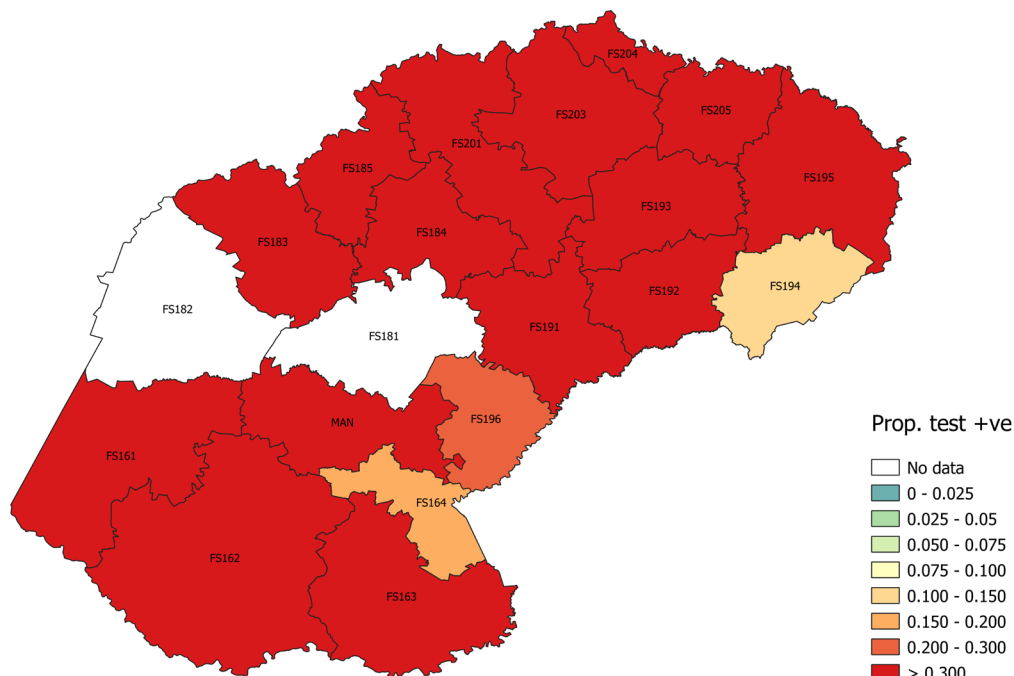


Figure 10. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in Free State Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

ETHN	eThekweni North	KZN233	Indaka	KZN273	The Big 5 False Bay
ETHS	eThekweni South	KZN234	Umtshezi	KZN274	Hlabisa
ETHS	eThekweni South	KZN235	Okhahlamba	KZN275	Mtubatuba
ETHW	eThekweni West	KZN236	Imbabazane	KZN281	Mfolozi
KZN211	Vulamehlo	KZN241	Endumeni	KZN282	uMhlathuze
KZN212	Umdoni	KZN242	Nqutu	KZN283	Ntambanana
KZN213	Umsombe	KZN244	Mzinga	KZN284	uMlalazi
KZN214	uMkuzwabantu	KZN245	Umvoti	KZN285	Mthonjaneni
KZN215	Ezingoleni	KZN252	Newcastle	KZN286	Nkandla
KZN216	Hibiscus Coast	KZN253	Emadlangeni	KZN291	Mandeni
KZN221	uMshwathi	KZN254	Dannhauser	KZN292	KwaDukuza
KZN222	uMngeni	KZN261	eDumbe	KZN293	Ndwedwe
KZN223	Mpofana	KZN262	uPhongolo	KZN294	Maphumulo
KZN224	Impendle	KZN263	Abaqulusi	KZN431	Ingwe
KZN225	The Mounduzi	KZN265	Nongoma	KZN432	Kwa Sani
KZN226	Mkhambathini	KZN266	Ullundi	KZN433	Greater Kokstad
KZN227	Richmond	KZN271	Umhlabyalingana	KZN434	Ubuhlebezwe
KZN232	Ennambithi/Ladysmith	KZN272	Jozini	KZN435	Umqimkhulu

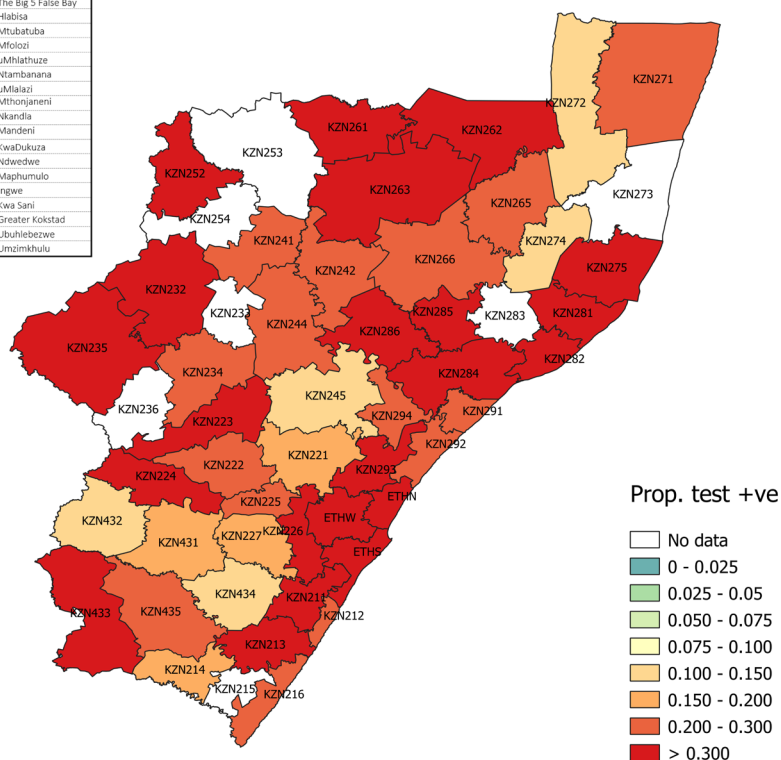


Figure 11. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in KwaZulu-Natal Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

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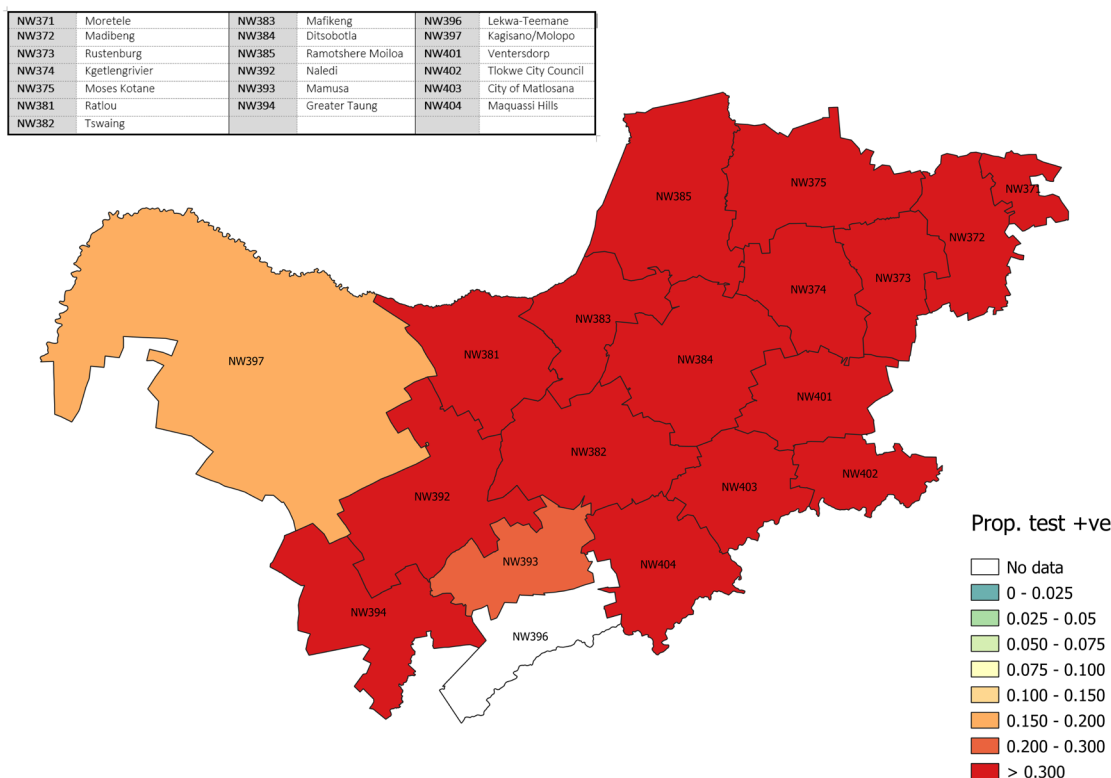


Figure 12. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in North West Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

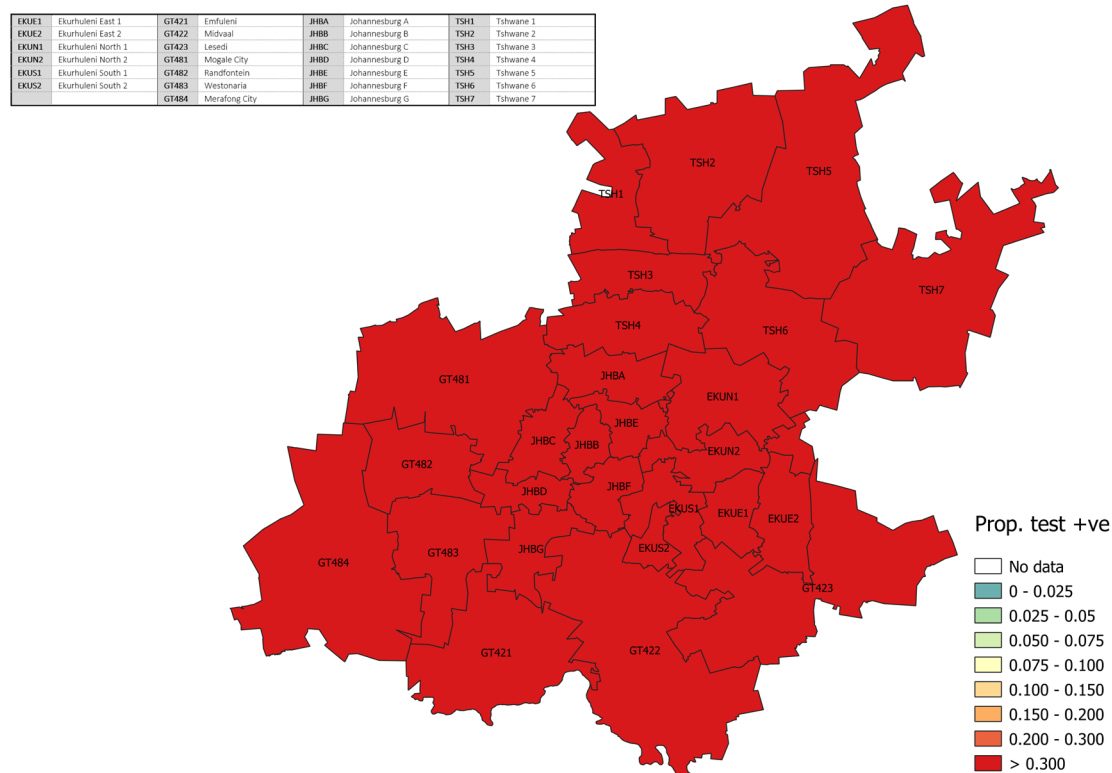


Figure 13. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in Gauteng Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

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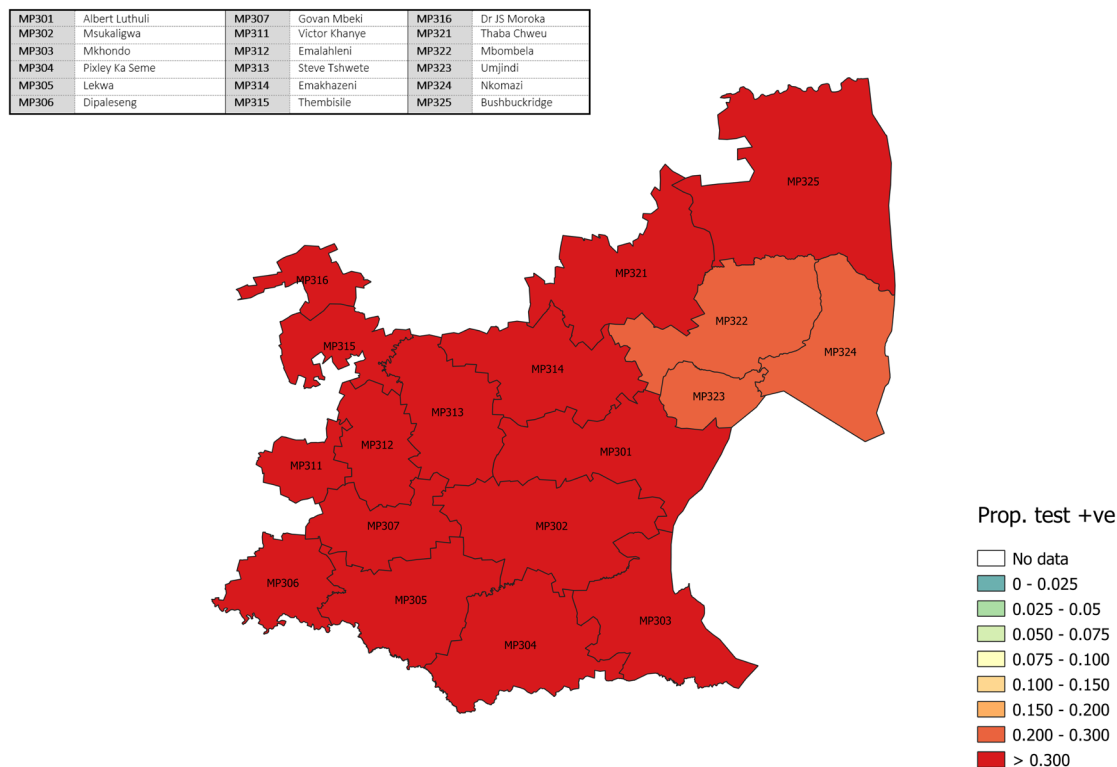


Figure 14. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in Mpumalanga Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

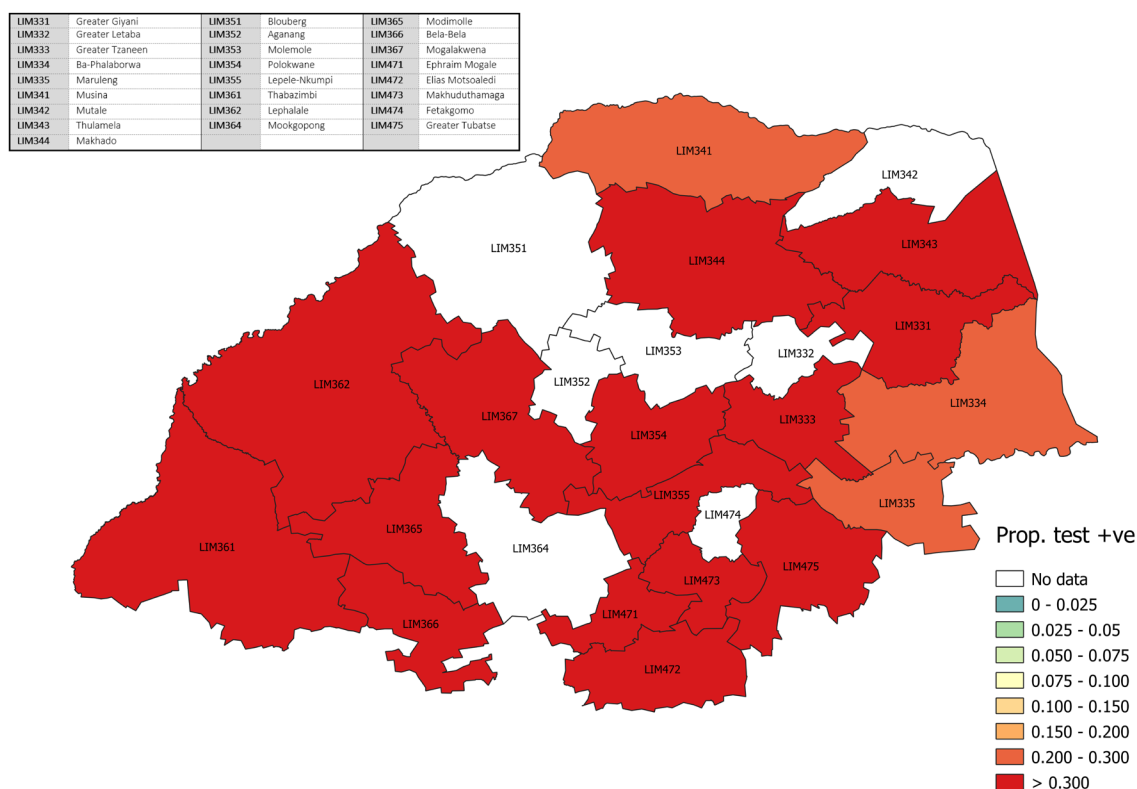


Figure 15. Proportion testing positive by health sub-district in Limpopo Province for the week of 5 - 11 December 2021. Areas shaded white represent districts in which either (i) no tests were reported (ii) all tests were negative or (iii) the confidence interval exceeded 30%.

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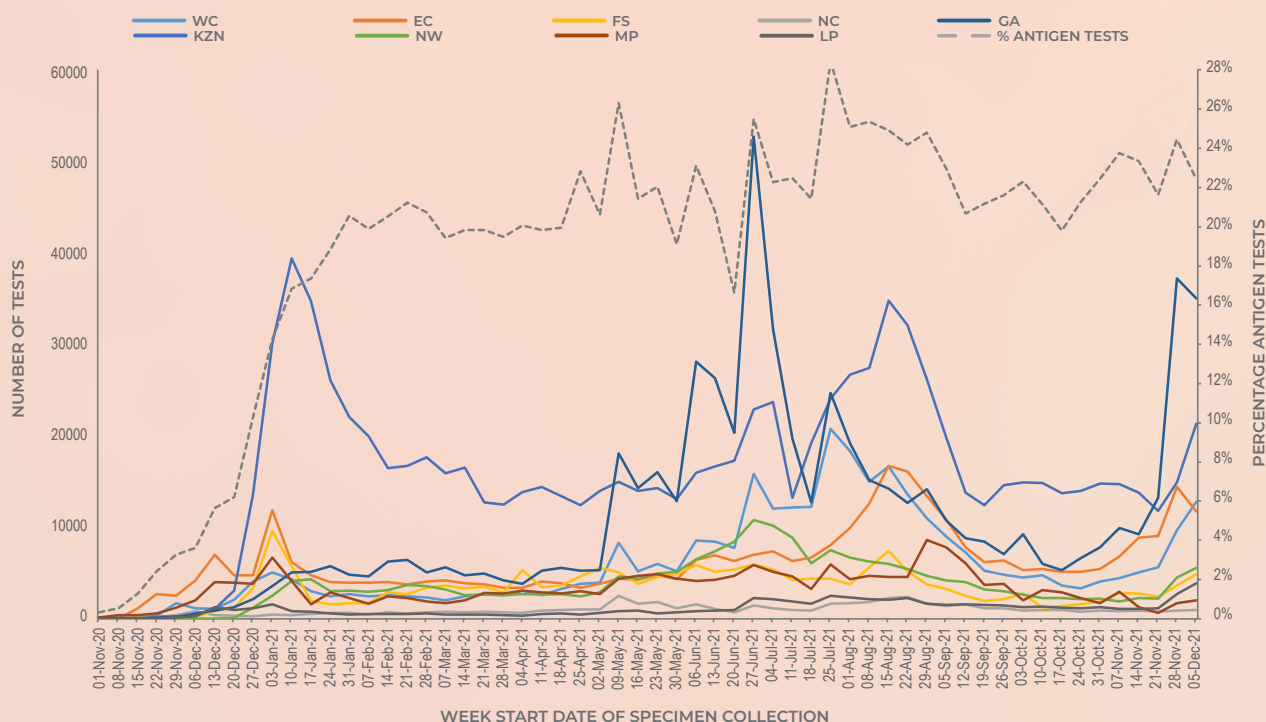


Figure 16. Number of antigen tests by province and overall percentage antigen tests, South Africa, 1 November 2020 – 11 December 2021. WC Western Cape; EC Eastern Cape; FS Free State; KZN KwaZulu-Natal; GA Gauteng; NC Northern Cape; NW North West; MP Mpumalanga; LP Limpopo

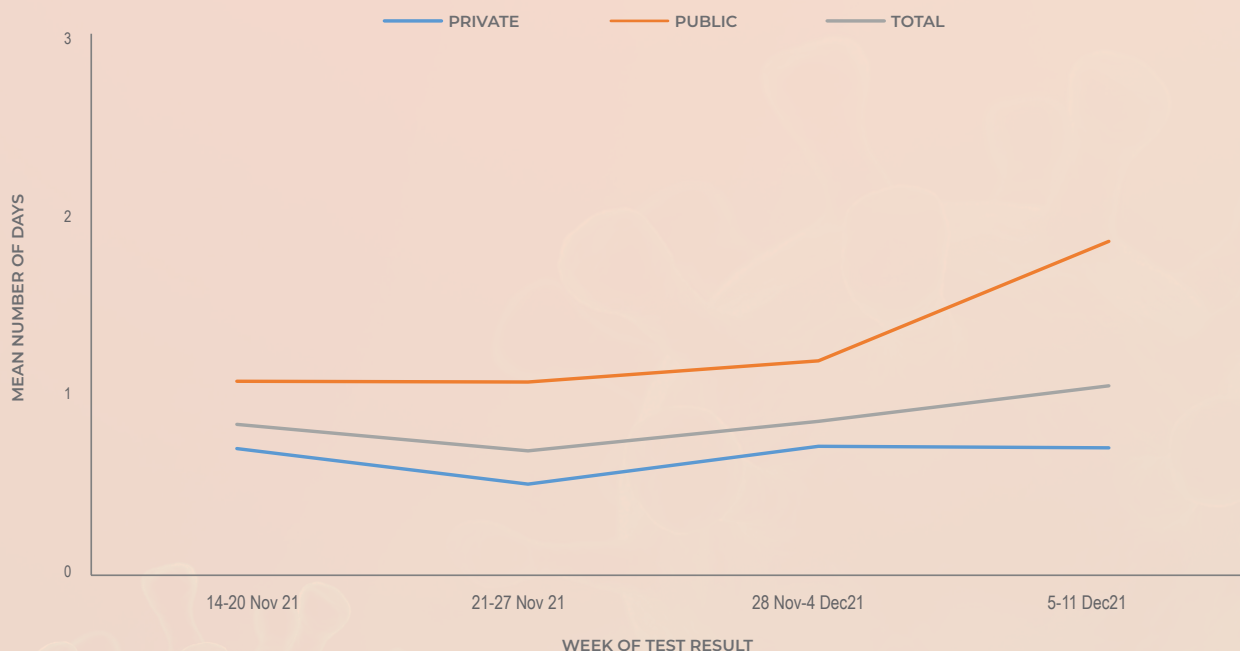


Figure 17. Mean number of days between date of specimen collection and date of test result for PCR tests by week of test result, South Africa, 14 November – 11 December 2021

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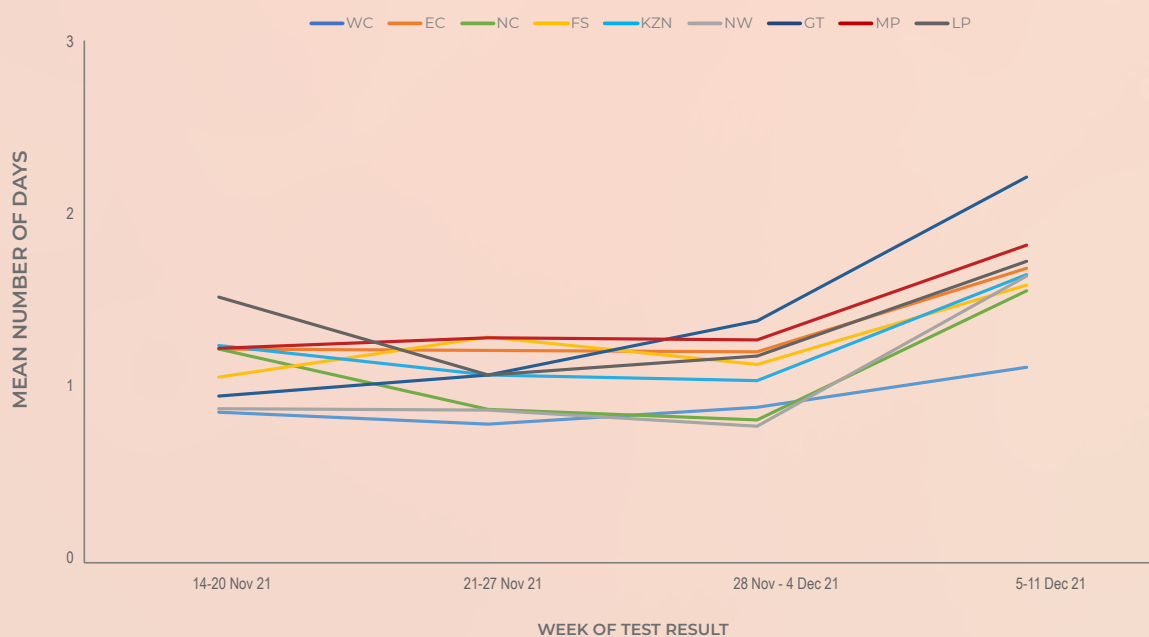


Figure 18. Mean number of days between date of specimen collection and date of test result for PCR tests in the public sector by week of test result and province, South Africa, 14 November – 11 December 2021. WC Western Cape; EC Eastern Cape; FS Free State; KZN KwaZulu-Natal; GT Gauteng; NC Northern Cape; NW North West; MP Mpumalanga; LP Limpopo

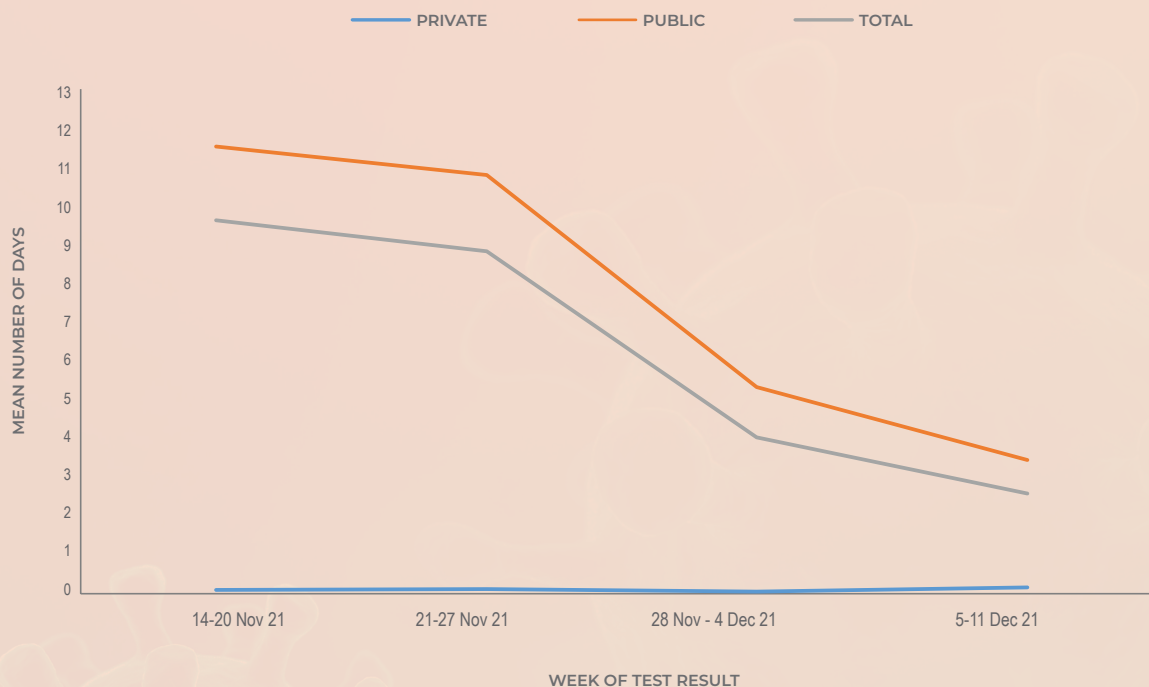


Figure 19. Mean number of days between date of specimen collection and date of test result for antigen tests by week of test result, South Africa, 14 November – 11 December 2021

COVID-19 TESTING SUMMARY

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Methods

Testing for SARS-CoV-2 began on 28 January 2020 at the NICD and after the first case was confirmed on 5th March 2020, testing was expanded to a larger network of private and NHLS laboratories. Laboratory testing was conducted for people meeting the case definition for persons under investigation (PUI). This definition was updated several times over the reporting period but at different times included (i) symptomatic individuals seeking testing, (ii) hospitalised individuals for whom testing was done, (iii) individuals in high-risk occupations, (iv) individuals in outbreak settings, and (v) individuals identified through community screening and testing (CST) programmes which were implemented in April 2020 and was discontinued from the week beginning 17th May. CST was implemented differently in different provinces, and ranged from mass screening approaches (including asymptomatic individuals) to screening of individuals in contact with a confirmed case to targeted testing of clusters of cases. Respiratory specimens were submitted to testing laboratories. Testing was performed using reverse transcriptase real-time PCR, which detects SARS-CoV-2 viral genetic material. Laboratories used any one of several in-house and commercial PCR assays to test for the presence of SARS-CoV-2 RNA. Testing for SARS-CoV-2 using rapid antigen-based tests was implemented towards the end of October 2020. Results of reported rapid antigen-based tests are included in this report, however data are incomplete and efforts are ongoing to improve data completeness.

Test results were automatically fed into a data warehouse after result authorisation. We excluded specimens collected outside South Africa and duplicate entries of the same test for an individual. From week 48 of 2020 onwards, test data were reported from the Notifiable Medical Conditions Surveillance System (NMCCS). Date of specimen receipt in the laboratory was used when date of specimen collection was missing. Proportion testing positive (PTP) was calculated as the number of positive tests/total number of tests and presented as percentage by multiplying with 100. We used 2020 mid-year population estimates from Statistics South Africa to calculate the testing rate, expressed as tests per 100,000 persons. Laboratory turnaround

times were calculated as the mean number of days between specimen collection and reporting of the result. Categorical variables were compared using the chi-squared test, with a P-value < 0.05 considered statistically significant.

Health district and sub-district (in the metros) level results were mapped based on geo-locatable public (approximately 93% of public sector facilities in the country) and private (approximately 80% of private testing facilities) sector testing facilities. Estimates of overall prevalence were derived using regression techniques. Estimates were adjusted to produce district-specific positive test prevalences based on the national average age and sex profile of testing for that week. This adjustment allows more accurate comparison of the proportion testing positive across districts. Districts with fewer than 20 tests reported during the week have been excluded from the analysis.

Limitations

- A backlog in testing of samples by laboratories affects the reported number of tests. As a result, numbers tested during this period may change in subsequent reports.
- If higher-priority specimens were tested preferentially this would likely result in an inflated proportion testing positive.
- Different and changing testing strategies (targeted vs. mass testing, PCR vs. antigen-based tests or prioritisation of severe or at-risk cases during epidemic waves) used by different provinces makes percentage testing positive and number of reported tests difficult to interpret and compare.
- Health district and sub-district level were mapped based on the testing facility and not place of residence.
- Patient admission status was categorised based on the reported patient facility and may not reflect whether the patient was actually admitted to hospital.
- Antigen tests may be underestimated as they are used in a number of different settings and results may not be reported.