

HEALTH

'Get your Covid-19 jab and wear your mask indoors'

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WITH the marked increase of Covid-19 infections in South Africa over the past week, health experts are urging community members to exercise caution.

"If you are in a close congregation – you are in a classroom, laboratory, library, offices – in this winter, where the ventilation is low, wear the mask. Mask wearing inside rooms is critical. It is very, very important. It is one of the most definitive ways of preventing Covid-19," Higher Health's chief executive, Professor Ramneek Ahluwalia told eNCA.

"In this winter, use more blankets but keep your windows open. Check your air conditioners – the cleaning of air conditioners is equally important."

Importantly, Ahluwalia said, people should get vaccinated and get their booster shots. "The fourth and most important advice is, get your immunity boosted timeously. When it is your time for the booster vaccine, do it, because this virus tries to invade when your immune system goes down."

He said although people who had been vaccinated might get minor



HIGHER Health chief executive Professor Ramneek Ahluwalia has warned citizens to wear masks indoors and vaccinate against Covid-19. | African News Agency (ANA)

infections, the vaccine saved them from severe infections and death.

"Mask, absolutely. When you are in close congregations. And please ask others to wear (masks) too," Ahluwalia said.

While experts said it was too early to determine if South Africa was entering its fifth wave, an increase in Covid-19 cases had been noted with some indicators pointing towards a possible resurgence.

Last week, the executive director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), Professor

Adrian Puren, said they expected to see an increase in cases. "An early warning indicator, wastewater detection surveillance shows an increase in Gauteng. However, (there are) no marked change in hospitalisations and deaths which are lag indicators."

On Friday, the NICD reported 4 631 new Covid-19 cases, which represents a 17.8% positivity rate.

In first two weeks of this month, the country's positivity rate ranged from 5% – 9%.

Earlier this month, leading epidemiologist Professor Salim

Abdool Karim warned people to remain vigilant as the next wave of infections was likely to set in around May, and be driven by a new variant, likely to be called Pi.

"That fifth wave will need to be driven by the new variant. That new variant is likely to be Pi. We now have to be ready for Pi. We have to anticipate that we are likely to see Pi probably in early May and we now have to make sure we have the tools to deal with it when it comes along," Abdool Karim told journalists at Rhodes University.

"What we can say is, Pi is going to spread faster than Omicron. We know it has to spread faster because if it cannot spread faster than Omicron, it will not be able to displace Omicron. Pi will come to exist because that new variant spreads faster."

He said indications were that Pi would not only spread faster, but would infect more people quicker.

"It will infect more people more quickly and therefore the pressure on the hospitals and so on will be over a shorter period. That is the situation we can expect," he added.