

KZN SEVERE WEATHER WARNING



SNOWREPORTSA, the country's primary snow forecasting and snow reporting organisation, provided this image of the heavy snowfall blanketing the area around the AfriSki Mountain Resort in Lesotho yesterday morning. | SnowReportSA/Martin Schultz

KAILENE PILLAY and SAKHISENI NXUMALO

DISASTER Management teams have been placed on high alert in KwaZulu-Natal, following a severe weather warning with thunderstorms and flooding expected to hit large parts of the province this week.

Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs MEC Siphso Hlomuka said heavy downpours could lead to localised flooding. Strong winds and large amounts of hail have also been forecast.

Over the next 24 hours, between 20mm and 40mm of rainfall is expected over parts of KZN, while between 5cm and 10cm of snowfall is expected over the Drakensberg and in Lesotho.

Residents living in low-lying areas and close to rivers in the Ugu, Harry Gwala, uMgungundlovu, uThukela, uMzinyathi and Amajuba Districts and the eThekweni Metro have been warned to take the necessary precautions, SA Weather Service forecaster Stacy Colborne said. She said the rain was expected to clear by Friday.

Raymond Perrier, co-ordinator of the National Homeless Network, said although sites for the homeless were set up five weeks ago when the weather was warmer and drier, they had made plans to deal with the approaching colder weather.

Perrier said that 400 men and 140 women who were disabled, elderly and sick had been housed in buildings. The men are being kept at the Denis Hurley Centre, while the women are being housed at the YMCA and a new municipal shelter in Mansel Road.

The younger and healthier have been housed in tents, he said.

"We have also identified the tents with leaks and have had them fixed. Sandbags have been used to prevent flooding on the grounds where the tents are situated," he said.

Perrier added the eThekweni Municipality's Safer City teams were on stand-by throughout the lockdown and working outside of normal working hours to ensure the homeless were being attended to.

"Running this programme is like trying to build a plane while flying it. We're doing things as best as we can and as they come up," Perrier said.

Deputy mayor Belinda Scott, who has taken the city's homeless programme under her wing, said medical mobile clinics were on site to attend to the homeless daily.

She said additional blankets would be provided to the homeless.

"Each site has a manager, static security and enrolled nurses who are assisted by metro police.

"The homeless are never left unattended and the staff will be on duty



HOMELESS Durban women Nomusa Mchunu, Nikiwe Chophela, Nomusa Dlamini use plastic sheets and cardboard to guard against the cold and rain but it does not offer sufficient protection especially during heavy rains. | DOCTOR NGCOBO African News Agency (ANA)

FLU SEASON: SCREENING AND TESTING WILL FACE CHALLENGES

WORLD-RENOWNED epidemiologist Salim Abdool Karim said scientists did not as yet have a clear understanding of what seasonality meant for the coronavirus.

Abdool Karim, who also heads government's Covid-19 ministerial advisory committee, said: "We must start on the basis that we have only known about this virus for four months, so we have not really seen how its seasonality changes. 'We know from influenza that it's seasonal and spreads mostly in winter. We don't know that about the coronavirus.'

He said some people had suggested the virus followed a similar seasonality because of the different manner in which it had affected the northern and southern hemispheres.

"When the virus was spreading in January and February, the countries in the north – Italy, Spain the US and Germany – had most of the spread. However, in countries in the south – Australia and New Zealand – the virus had not spread that much. So there was some initial hypothesis there might be some seasonality," Abdool Karim said.

But, Abdool Karim added, "the evidence is flimsy and just not robust enough to make any conclusions".

As South Africa entered its colder, winter months, the Department

of Health's screening and testing programme would face challenges in differentiating those infected with Covid-19 from those with regular flu.

"We know we'll start seeing an increase in the flu in the next month or two. When we go into fully-fledged flu season there'll be a lot of people going to doctors and hospitals with flu. Coronavirus and flu present similarly," Abdool Karim said.

Flu could potentially be as severe and Abdool Karim said doctors would have to conduct tests for Covid-19 when patients presented with flu symptoms.

It was possible that tests for flu would be done at the same time, he added.

Abdool Karim said South Africans should consider having a flu vaccine, but warned that it would not protect them from Covid-19 infection.

He reiterated the importance of washing or sanitising hands, practising physical distancing and wearing face masks during winter.

◆ According to the latest Statistics South Africa Mortality and Causes of Death report released in March, flu was the cause of 18 837 or 4.2% of all natural deaths in 2017.

Of these, elderly women aged 65 and over comprised 3 813 or 4.1% of deaths. | LYSE COMINS

during the inclement weather," Scott said.

Homeless people on the streets of Durban, who are not staying in the shelters provided, said they used plastic sheets and cardboard to protect them from the rain and cold.

Nikiwe Chophela, who sleeps on the street with other elderly mothers, said they wrapped themselves in plastic every night to keep warm.

"When you are wet, it becomes even more cold and we battle to sleep," said Chophela.