



Ministry Justice and Correctional Services
Republic of South Africa

Deputy Minister of Correctional Services, Nkosi Phathekile Holomisa;
Premier of the Eastern Cape, Mr Oscar Mabuyane;
MEC for Health in the Eastern Cape, Ms Sindiswa Gomba;
National Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Arthur Fraser;
Eastern Cape Regional Commissioner, Mr Mbambo; and
Members of the Media

As the Department of Correctional Services, we have been implementing a comprehensive approach to prevent the transmission and spread of COVID-19 in our centres and offices. We have regularly given updates that contextualize our COVID-19 approach which is focused on prevention, containment, treatment and recovery. All our efforts mirror our caring nature as we work towards ensuring the wellbeing of offenders and officials.

However, today what has brought us here in the East London Correctional Centre, are developments we wished we could avoid but unfortunately, they befell us. We know that we are dealing with an invisible and vicious enemy that does not discriminate who it targets. We are sad to announce that we have recorded 26 positive cases of COVID-19 here in East London, at Medium C Female Centre, for 23 officials and three offenders. We are still awaiting more results of those who have been tested.

The positive cases follows mass screening that the Eastern Cape Region embarked upon at the Medium C Female Centre after the first positive case was recorded at the facility on 06 April 2020. The official who tested positive, attended a funeral where she interacted with people from overseas. Thirty officials (30) who came into contact with the official were requested to self-quarantine when this case was still a presumptive case. There was a second positive case on the 08th of April 2020 when an official who solicited the services of a private laboratory received her result.

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) on the 08th and 09th of April 2020 then conducted a mass screening of 268 offenders at Medium C Female Centre, testing 30 offenders who showed symptoms of COVID-19, and also testing a total of 266 officials in the East London Correctional Centre. This number is inclusive of the 92 officials from the Medium C Female Centre. Yesterday, 193 offenders were tested at Medium C Female Centre for COVID-19 and the remaining 46 offenders will be tested tomorrow.

In terms of the results released by the NICD, twenty one (21) officials tested positive at Medium C Female Centre, thus making a total of 23 positive officials, 40 officials tested negative and we await results of 40 officials. 13 officials at Maximum Centre tested negative, 03 officials at Medium B tested negative and 06 officials from the Area Commissioner's Office tested negative.

Three offenders tested positive, ten offenders tested negative and we await results of all other offenders who have been tested. We expect the outstanding results on the 14th of April 2020.

Mass testing in the entire East London Centre for both offenders and officials will continue. The NICD is tracing all those who were in contact with officials who tested positive so that they can self-quarantine until they are tested and cleared. We have taken immediate steps to prevent any potential spread of the virus arising from these recorded positive cases.

We have identified single cells within Medium C Female Centre which are designated as quarantine and isolation areas. There are officials who work in these designated areas and they have been supplied with PPEs which include Disposable Suits, Disposable Gowns, Shoe Covers, N95 Masks and Eye Shields among others.

The total number of offenders at the East London Medium C Female Centre is 269 as of the 11th of April 2020. We also have two offenders with babies. Loved ones of the two offenders are willing to take care of the two babies and the process to release the babies under their care is underway.

We are working with the Department of Health to immediately start with the treatment procedure of all those infected. We will heighten preventative measures and continue to avail PPEs to both offenders and

officials. We will be receiving daily preventative and containment reports as well as incidences within the correctional services value chain, especially at the coalface.

The fact that positive cases were recorded when the country is under national lockdown where restriction of movement for all citizens is enforced, was a mitigating factor against the rapid spread of COVID-19 by officials who tested positive. Had it not been for the national lockdown, presumably, the virus would have been further spread across the province. This is evidence that lockdown measures are effective and if adhered to, could decrease the spread of the virus.

We know that some sections of offenders have protested bitterly against measures we introduced during the lockdown period, which include prohibiting visits across all centres. This measure is meant to protect both offenders and officials against COVID-19.

Offenders have also complained about lack of access to money from their loved ones during the lockdown period. We have opened cash accounts with banks for all centres, this will enable people to deposit money to offenders. Money could also transmit the virus, therefore, the fact that it is deposited at banks and not brought physically at centres, is one of the preventative measures that decreases the spread of COVID-19.

In the Eastern Cape, as of the 1st of April 2020, we have a total of 20 559 offenders, nationally, under the same period, we have a total of 154 437 offenders. As DCS, we are committed to ensure that all offenders have access to quality healthcare. We will also continually work towards protecting offenders from COVID-19, but we equally seek their cooperation so that together we can be safe from this virus.

We will be intensifying the multi-media awareness campaign targeting officials, offenders and our stakeholders to heighten their consciousness around COVID-19 transmissions and its spread. We want them to be agents of change so that they can continue educating their counterparts and those they interact with on the dangers of failure to observe preventative measures.

At this moment, we want all South Africans not to panic as we have a coherent anti Covid-19 strategy that incorporates the expertise of different spheres of government. We are confident that infected officials and offenders will recover from this pandemic.

We have absolute confidence in our Covid-19 measures and we are confident that they will lead to recoveries that will 'give birth' to a correctional services free of the virus. Let us work together and adhere to the directions gazetted as the greatest contributor of the spread of COVID-19 has been the failure to observe preventative measures.

We also take pride in the commitment of our officials in this era of the Covid-19 pandemic, which in unprecedented proportions, confronts the entire global community. It hampers the ability of state institutions to continue providing uninterrupted services, but at DCS, we profoundly appreciate the fact that we have officials dedicated to the course of combating Covid-19.

These are men and women committed to herald an era of flattening the curve of coronavirus in the country. We are proud of the fact that their efforts embody the public services that we seek to create in the sixth administration. Their efforts have been the enduring stamina that has enabled DCS not to record positive cases for COVID-19 across all its centres for a longer period of time.

We also want to express our profound appreciation for all the efforts and support from the Eastern Cape Provincial Government, led by Premier Mabuzyane. They have greatly contributed to our anti-Covid-19. We will continue drawing from their expertise and resources and together, we will defeat Covid-19.

I want to appeal once more to all our people to adhere to the national lockdown, as President Cyril Ramaphosa correctly said, "If we end the lockdown too soon and too abruptly, we risk an resurgence of the disease which will render all our efforts meaningless after all the great sacrifices we have made."

Ndiyabulela!

Issued by the Ministry of Correctional Services

Spokesperson Chrispin Phiri +27 (0) 81 781 2261