National Environmental Health Day and Environmental Health Indaba, 2021

Governance and leadership in Environmental Health and *National's perspective on response to COVID-19*

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Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Presentation outline

- Introduction

- Planning

- Governance and Leadership

- Policy and Guidelines Development

- Capacity Building

- Implementation and Monitoring

- Key Achievements

- Challenges

- Areas of Improvement

Introduction and background

NDoH activated the Public Health Emergency of International Concern in 2020 after reports of COVID-19 emerged from China. The new strain of coronaviruses first emerged in December 2019 when a cluster of pneumonia cases were reported in Wuhan city, China. The virus was later identified and named COVID-19 by The World Health Organization (WHO).

- January 09 declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern
- WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020
- RSA declared COVID-19 a state of National Disaster on 15 March 2020
- A lockdown was announced on the 23rd march, effective from 27 March 2020.
- The Incident Management Team (IMT) was activated at NDoH to replace the Public Health Emergency of International Concern
- A Security cluster structure was established to manage issues of national concern in a coordinated manner. NATJOINTS

Planning

Environmental Health and Port Health Services Plan

RSA entered a planning stage to prepare for a wholistic response to the outbreak

The following activities were planned:

- Intervention strategies for sanitization, disinfection and decontamination for public areas to support NDoH strategic response to COVID-19 containment and prevention.

- Coordination of the Identification of the number of high-volume public areas and government sectors at sub-district and district level that should be prioritized for sanitization, disinfection and decontamination: *PHC, CHCs, Hospitals, SAPS, Taxi Ranks, Correctional Services, Council Chambers, Malls, Shopping Centres and Spaza shops*

- Development intervention strategies for active containment, prevention of COVID-19 for high-public areas and government sectors.

Environmental Health and Port Health Services Plan

The following activities were planned:

- Review and adopt current public health hygiene strategy in support of containment, prevention and immediate sanitization of public areas.

- Develop projections modelling activity plan for mortuary capacity and burial site planning

- Identify the number of funeral parlours, crematoriums, mapped out at municipal level across South Africa

- Identify the number of burial sites and availability of land for anticipated increase in burials in the 52 districts in South Africa

Planned Activities

Activities	Approved Activities
A long list of MHS activities were identified but eliminated after internal discussions took place	• Indicators had to check the date of inspection • Compliance with EH requirements • Compliance with COVID-19 and Health Requirements • Actions taken to respond to pandemic • Date of follow up and comments These had to be checked at the following Premises • Health Facilities • Schools • Quarantine Facilities • Old Age Homes • Mortuaries and funeral undertakers premises • Cemeteries

Governance and Leadership

Governance and leadership

- Governance structures were established at all spheres of government
- Representation and participation in various inter-governmental and inter-sectoral committees for coordination of response activities:

  - MNORT and EOC – collapsed into Incident Management Team (IMT)
  - National Joints Operational and Intelligence Structure
  - National Air Traffic Facilitation Committee
  - Provincial Joints Operational and Intelligence Structures

- Implementation of Training to Capacitate EHPs and other role players;

  - Training of Provincial MHS EHPs and PHO's on COVID-19 response coordinated by both the department and the NICD
  - Awareness sessions to enhance understanding of COVID-19 and response activities to stakeholders in PoE (DHA, SAPS, SARS etc.)

Policy and Guidelines Development

Legislation gaps and lessons learnt

- Early stages of the pandemic: no legislation that empowered Minister to promptly introduce drastic measures to prevent and delay the introduction of COVID-19 (i.e closure of borders, restrictions to travel from affected countries etc.)

- IHR, 2005 not being domesticated in South African law resulting a legislative gap wrt enforcement of provisions thereto

- Fragmentation of functions – health functions being spearheaded by other departments

Documents Developed

DOCUMENT	SUMMARY OF PURPOSE
Environmental Health Standards For Emergency Shelters For Homeless People during the COVID 19 Pandemic	To guide on the requirements and measures to be implemented at the shelters of the homeless during the COVID -19 disaster to prevent the likelihood of the spread of COVID-19 and to respond to a COVID-19 outbreak situation within the shelter environment.
COVID-19 National Public Hygiene Strategy and Implementation Plan	To improve and promote public hygiene and cleanliness as a key intervention to the delay and spread of Corona virus in South Africa.
COVID-19 Environmental Health Response Guidelines 2020.	Outlines the role of environmental health in COVID 19 response and outlines monitoring measures for hygiene, waste management, disposal of the dead and general compliance monitoring

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Documents Developed

DOCUMENT	SUMMARY OF PURPOSE
Environmental Health Guidelines for the management of human remains in the context of COVID-19	To provide guidance and advice to funeral undertakers and other stakeholders on management of human remains
Environmental Health Standards For Emergency Shelters For Homeless People during the COVID 19 Pandemic	To guide on the requirements and measures to be implemented at the shelters of the homeless during the COVID -19 disaster to prevent the likelihood of the spread of COVID-19 and to respond to a COVID-19 outbreak situation within the shelter environment.
Health Directions for management of COVID-19 and subsequent amendments	To provide for measures to contain and combat the spread of COVID-19 in international travel

Documents Developed

DOCUMENT	SUMMARY OF PURPOSE
Guidelines for Port Health Services in Relation to the COVID-19 Outbreak	To provide guidance to port health officials on health measures that must be implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
Standard Operating Procedures on the Management of Returning Travellers Exempted from Quarantine.	To outline procedures for travellers exempted from mandatory quarantine entry requirements.
Standard Operating Procedures for the Transportation of Returning Citizens Through Points of Entry to Quarantine Facilities	To outline procedures to be implemented for arriving travellers transported to quarantine facilities and coordination with Provincial health.
Guideline on Health Measures for Processing Travellers for Port Health	Provide for revised measures to be implemented following the opening of the borders and the resumption of international travel.
Standard Operating Procedures on the Management of Truck Drivers in Relation to COVID-19.	Outline procedures to be implemented for cross border truck drivers who tested positive outside of the borders of the Republic and needed to be transported back.

Capacity Building

Capacity Building Activities

- The department conducted over 30 capacity building exercises and over 3930 stakeholders were reached.

- The focus was on EHPs at National (General and Port Health) Provinces, Municipalities, funeral undertakers and churches.

- Traditional leaders organisations were also included due to developments during the response.

- Four (4) set of IEC materials developed and approved by Communications on waste management to create awareness.

- **The Next Four Slides Shows The Capacity Building Activities Undertaken: Capacity Building Was Done For All Documents Developed Before Implementation**

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Capacity Building Activities

Name of training	Stakeholders trained	Number trained	Date
National Environmental Health training on COVID-19	Environmental Health Practitioners	157 Physical and others joined via Zoom	18 March 2020
COVID-19 training on Occupational Health and Safety for Environmental Health Practitioners	Environmental Health Practitioners(EHPs)	Zoom 850	24 April 2020
Management of human remains	EHP's, Forensic Pathology Services, Funeral Undertakers Associations	58	26 May 2020
Management of human remains	EHP's, Forensic Pathology Services, Funeral Undertakers Associations	62	29 May 2020
Management of human remains	Hindu religious leaders	20	14 July 2020
Eastern Cape and SALGA meeting on management of human remains	Environmental Health Practitioners and SALGA	16	15 July 2020
Management of human remains training for Communicators	Communicators from provinces and national offices	30	16 July 2020

Capacity Building Activities

Name of training	Stakeholders trained	Number trained	Date
Health Directives on management of human remains	Funeral Associations	50	27 July 2020
Management of human remains	Traditional leaders	10	03 August 2020
Advisory on death to burial for Northern Cape			
Advisory on death to burial for Western Cape Province	EHP's Forensic Pathology Services Project Lead	25	05 August 2020
Management of human remains in Ekurhuleni Northern Region	Environmental Health Practitioners	6	07 August 2020
Advisory on death to burial for Free State province	EHP's	11	11 August 2020
Advisory on death to burial for KZN	SALGA, EHP's, Disaster Management, COGTA, Councillors, Cemetery Managers,	71	12 August 2020

Capacity Building Activities

Name of training	Stakeholders trained	Number trained	Date
Advisory on death to burial for North West	Hospital services, Forensic Pathology Services; EHP's' EMS and Clinical support	20	25 August 2020
Management of human remains addressing concerns raised by Funeral Association	EHP's; Forensic Pathology Services and Funeral Association	13	28 August 2020
Management of human remains addressing concerns raised by Funeral Association	EHP's	14	28 August 2020
Advisory on death to burial for Mpumalanga	Communicable Disease Control, EHP's	10	31 August 2020
Management of human remains for provinces and municipalities – addressing concern raised by Funeral Association	EHP's		01 September 2020
Management of human remains – addressing concerns with KZN province and municipalities	EHP's	24	10 September 2020

Capacity Building Activities

Name of training	Stakeholders trained	Number trained	Date
SALGA dialogue	EHP's	123	25 September 2020
World Environmental Health Day Celebration	EHP's	1500	29 September 2020
Gauteng Management of human remains	EHP's; Forensic Pathology Services	9	15 October 2020
Global Hand washing Day	EHP's; Infection Control;		15 October 2020
Management of human remains for Tshwane Municipality based Funeral undertakes	Funeral undertakers		27 – 29 October 2020

Monitoring

Monitoring of the Response Plan

NDoH Coordinated of Monitoring for the following premises was was undertaken

- **Old Age Homes Inspection**
- **Beaches**
- **Vaccination Sites**
- **Schools**
- **Health Facilities**
- **Taxi Ranks**
- **Funeral undertakers and Cemeteries**

Application of regulations

Media Queries Attended

- Illegal Exhumation of Human remains on account of cultural issues

- Wrapping of human remains and coffins with plastic

- Requirement for a CoC when collecting human remains

- Disinfection practices after a COVID-19 positive case

Complaints Management

- IMT established a call centre where all complaints were directed for further handling and management

- EHS also established a sub unit to work with the national call centre

- A team of EHPs were seconded to manage the EHS call centre.

- This call centre ensured that members of the public had a platform to report non complying premises and employers.

- The coordination structure between Provinces and NDoH worked very well

Parliamentary Questions Received

Parliament continued to provide an oversight role during the outbreak through posing questions to Ministers, some of the questions received included the following:

- Measures taken to regulate retail stores to combat spread of COVID-19.

- Measures that NDOH has put in place to ensure earmarked COVID-19 quarantine facilities have been inspected, are fully compliant and ready to serve their purpose.

- Questions related to the second wave

- Questions related to the use of body bags

- Questions related to multiple burial

- Questions on Mortuaries and Death

- Questions on vacant positions and Questions on testing of Covid-19

Key Achievements

- Appointment of additional staff to strengthen staffing in PoE (resulting in community service backlog being addressed)

- Effectively legislated through the Disaster Management legislative process the health measures for international travel

- Received support to pilot first ever digital health questionnaire to assist in screening and surveillance

- Representation of port health, environmental health in key decision making structures

CHALLENGES

Challenges

- Although successfully appointed Comm serves to strengthen HR, after the lapse of their contracts the service continued experiencing staffing challenges due to lack of budget to appoint additional staff.

- Lack of cooperation by some Provinces on activating quarantine facilities for returning.

- Insufficient budget to sustain implementation of health measures (quarantine of returning travellers, digitization of questionnaire and appointment of staff).

- Mis-alignment of Provincial priorities and National priorities (provinces more focused on attending to their population rather than provide services in quarantine facilities for returning travellers.)

Challenges

- Non-inclusion/representation of Port Health in outbreak response teams in some Provinces resulting in lack of coordinated response.

- Resistance by industry sector to introduced health measures

- Delays in approval of Health Directions resulting in other departments taking the lead on matters that required Health to legislate.

- Non-alignment of legislation between sectors resulting in confusion (i.e. Health and Transport Directions).

- Economic priorities taking precedence over health.

- There has been challenges in coordinating reporting from Municipalities due to conflicting mandates of the different Spheres of Government.

Challenges

- Enforcement could not be achieved due to Provinces reporting that some of their officials were not trained as peace officers hence there were limitations in terms of taking legal actions.

- Provinces reported that they are trying to keep up with the compliance drive even though they were engaged in other programs.

- Generally, there were delays in reporting and most municipalities were not reporting as expected.

- *The department relies on provinces and municipalities to implement response activities on environmental health. It would happen, as usually expected, that provinces and municipalities would have prioritised other focus areas which would overwhelm officials at operational level and affect reporting on activities undertaken.*

Challenges

- Delay in the involvement of EH in establishment of national quarantine sites and poor coordination of quarantine sites.
- Poor management of health care risk waste in some quarantine sites.
- Lack of submission of provincial consolidated inspection reports.
- Multi legislation of disinfectants across 4 government sectors causing lots of clarity seeking enquiries from the industry and the EH fraternity.
- Emergence of environmental challenges e.g. increase in health care waste generation, poisoning incidents from domestic disinfectants & sanitizers
- The more movement to lower lockdown levels, and the more cases increases, the more response work for EHPs, while striking a balance with other community EH service delivery requests and needs becomes a challenge.
- Attendance by national of complaints/enquiries lodged by local communities/businesses which consumes time of work that needs to be handled at national level.

Areas of Possible Improvement

Areas of possible improvement

- Better coordination and communication between spheres of government and other government agencies
- Review of existing legislation to strengthen pandemic response
- Need to continuously review and test preparedness plans
- Decisive decision making to inform response activities
- Creating balance between economic recovery and health priorities to avoid compromising response measures
- Need to have empowering legislation allowing department to promptly introduce additional health measures based on the nature of the public health risk.
- There needs to be a more proactive approach rather than reactive to prevent and respond to public health risks.
- Need to strengthen inter-governmental relations and coordination.
- Advocate for funding for managing and responding to pandemics.

Thank you

T	together
E	everyone
A	achieves
M	more