

The Christian Voice

Sunday, 26 July, 2020

ON A WEEKEND

COVID-19 WATCH ▶ **2512** cases | **518** recoveries | **34** deaths

Most churches remain closed as Covid-19 cases spike

Most churches have made the decision to remain closed despite the Governments' lockdown regulations allowing them to hold services under stringent Covid-19 health requirements.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) Secretary General Dr Kenneth Mtata confirmed that churches under the council have remained closed as consultations with the Ministry of Health indicated that reopening will place thousands of people under a lot of risk.

"In the absence of clarity and in light of increasing infections, we recommend that all church gatherings, no matter the size, be postponed for now," said Dr Mtata in a circular sent to the churches.

Dr Mtata said that most of the churches have no capacity for screening and contact tracing.

"Many (churches) do not even have infrared thermometers and proper sanitising

capabilities," he said.

Speaking on the same issue and posting to a church leaders platform, the President for ZCC Bishop Lazarus Khanye, said that the council felt that it is better to err on the side of caution.

Bishop Eustice Ginya of the African Episcopal Methodist Church also confirmed that their churches have closed and are conducting virtual services.

Seventh Day Adventist churches have also remained closed, citing the increasing cases of Covid-19 and need to protect communities.

Apostle Levy Moyo, head of The Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe, also confirmed that for the past two Sundays all their churches have remained closed.

"We cannot be so desperate to hold services that we put people's lives in danger. We realise how dangerous Covid-19 pandemic is," he said.

Harvest House International this Sunday closed its services to observe the situation,

"We take the dangers posed by the virus seriously and are reverting to virtual services again," said Senior Rev. Dr Sarah Nyathi.

Snr Rev Dr Nyathi called on the churches to unite and have one decision to save lives.

"I think in such times of crisis

our personal opinions and preferences should be put aside," she said.

Selborne Park Christian Church has remained closed and will review its position in August, Pastor Mzizi said.

Other church leaders who include Bishop Tudor Bismack of New Life Covenant Church and Bishop Henry Muzhari of Family Covenant Church are conducting online services.

However, other church leaders felt that the decision should be left at local church level.

Mr Mangwana, in a surprise reversal, who had posted governments' position on his twitter page that churches could open and limit numbers to 50, wrote on a personal note that the reopening of churches was unwise.

"This is my personal opinion whatever the law says, I believe it is irresponsible to hold church services this time considering what's in front of us," he said in his twitter post.

However, other church leaders questioned why ZUPCO buses and supermarkets should continue to operate because they posed a greater threat than the church services.

Head of Word and Worship Centre, Pastor Kenneth Chirimuta, said that if the government is seeing the risk in churches it should also ban the ZUPCO buses.

Thabang Nare, a social and faith commentator, said that the church should show more responsibility and leadership by stopping the services and reinventing its methods of engagement and reaching out to the world.

"It's clear we have a serious issue, and our hospitals have limited to zero capacity to cope," he said.



Rev Dr Kenneth Mtata

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‘Appoint substantive Minister of Health’

Despite the rapid increase in cases of Covid-19 virus in Zimbabwe, the country and the health system still continues to function without a substantive Minister of Health and Child Care and a Permanent Secretary.

Faced with a global pandemic that has claimed millions of lives, Zimbabwe is struggling to respond in a coherent and efficient manner.

The Ministry fell vacant after President Emerson Mnangagwa fired former Minister Obadiah Moyo who is facing corruption charges. Currently the Ministry is being led by Minister Aaron Murwira who is also doubling up as the Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education.

The leadership vacuum has been felt in the health sector as more nurses and doctors get infected with the virus. Deplorable states at quarantine and isolation centres have also been condemned by the public as they fear that these places were a breeding ground for the virus.

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Commuters now fear ZUPCO buses and queues



Commuters wait for buses at City Hall terminus

The banning of other public transport service providers except for ZUPCO has created a dangerous recipe for the rapid spread of Covid-19 among commuters.

According to the latest figures and report from the Ministry of Health and Child Care, as of this Saturday, 2 434 Zimbabweans have tested positive while 34 have died.

Health authorities in the city have since identified Cowdray Park, Magwegwe West, Nkulumane and Emganwini suburbs as having the highest number of infections while in terms of institutions, the hotspots have been identified as Mpilo Central Hospital, United Bulawayo Hospitals, Khami Maximum Prison and Bulawayo Prison. Nonetheless, it could not be established how many confirmed cases were attributed to each locality.

Speaking on the sidelines of a provincial Covid-19 task force meeting at Ekusileni Hospital yesterday, Bulawayo City Council Director of Health Services, Dr Edwin Sibanda said of all the confirmed 59 cases had been admitted to Thorngrove Hospital and Elangeni Isolation facilities.

“Within the identified suburbs, we have noted that the major threat to containing the spread will be the public transport industry (Zupco buses) and bowser water distribution points. Our immediate recommendations are the need to expedite completion of admission facilities and the testing of everyone within hotspots and the scaling up of preventive measures,” said Dr Sibanda.

Commuters are now living in fear of boarding the ZUPCO buses and joining queues as Covid-

19 pandemic begins to take its toll among Zimbabweans.

“We are in a difficult space, ZUPCO is the only sole provider of public transport which has resulted in crowds and we don’t have any alternative if we need to go to work except ZUPCO,” said Mr Tendai Chibwebwe.

Mr Chibwebwe said that he gets anxious every time he is queuing or boards a ZUPCO bus.

Meanwhile, Mpilo Central Hospital clinical director, Professor Solwayo Ngwenya, said commuters and the public should adhere to standard health regulations when in public spaces.

Professor Ngwenya said a lot of people in the country were defying the lockdown regulations and paying no heed to social distancing which is crucial in the curb of the virus. He said the virus was increasing in the community.

“The virus is gaining strength in the community; this can only go statistically one way. It’s a whitewash, we could see thousands of deaths,” he said.

Veteran journalist and Cite director, Zenzele Ndebele urged people to change their behaviour towards the virus. He said those who are using public transport and using boreholes or water bowlers as water sources should exercise extreme caution.

“People should change their attitudes and behaviour. Yes, we can blame the leaders for not providing enough transport, but we all know they do not care. We are on our own, every person should do whatever is possible to stay alive,” he said.

Appoint substantive Minister of Health!

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The Senior Hospital Doctors Association recently issued a statement calling on the President to appoint a substantive Minister as they proffered little faith in the acting Minister. The doctors allege that because of his arrogance, they were not prepared to continue working with Murwira, who is the substantive Higher and Tertiary Education Minister.

Senior Hospital Doctors Association secretary-general Arron Musara said,

“We hope the President will appoint a new substantive Health Minister as soon as possible because there is chaos in the ministry at the moment. We have difficulties working with the acting minister because to us he appears arrogant. He claims to know everything and we have issues with him regarding his desire to put us under his

ministry. He wants to make us his subjects and we are opposed to that,” he said.

As the country battles against the coronavirus, citizens are waiting with unabated breaths to see whether the President will appoint a substantive Minister as soon as possible

“I am imploring the President to appoint a substantive Minister so as to capacitate the Ministry. The current acting Minister also doubles up as the head of Higher and Tertiary, a Ministry that is also overwhelmed with Universities that are writing exams and struggling to save the 2020 academic year. I strongly believe that the appointment of the substantive Minister will bring direction to the health sector”, said Learnmore Mlilo, a theological student from TCZ. Another citizen spoken to said that the leadership vacuum was a breeding ground for the escalation of the virus.

“The substantive Minister should be appointed as

soon as possible. The country is currently battling the virus and we happen not to have a Minister of Health. Cases have gone to more than 2000 now. The Ministry is also overwhelmed with the testing, tracing and isolation of Covid-19 patients which should be headed by a Minister”, said David Maketo from Harare.

Some of the citizens also called for the speedy appointment of the Minister but however they called for accountability within the Ministry.

“The former Minister was fired because of corruption hence I am praying that the incoming Minister will not be tempted to do corrupt activities. As you can see many institutions have poured millions of dollars into the fight against the pandemic therein this will be a temptation for corrupt officials to peddle in”, tweeted one Ndabezinhle Ndlovu.

Vendors lobby for special border reopening

The Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association (BVTA) is lobbying the Zimbabwean and the South African government to consider the reopening of borders for vendors to restock.

In a press statement the association said it was disturbed that vendors continue to make illegal crossings to restock, placing themselves and other citizens in danger.

“BVTA is very disturbed by the video circulating on social media where informal cross border traders are walking in a single file, giving testimonies on their situation, after being rounded by members of the armed forces in South Africa patrolling the border. The plight of these women and men who cross to South Africa (Musina) to order goods for re-selling cannot be ignored anymore,” read the statement.

BVTA also noted that due to the closure of borders, some of the vendors are resorting to using the illegal routes to restock. They appealed to the two governments to look into the matter, as crossing at illegal points was a danger.

“We are appealing to the Zimbabwean and South African governments to urgently look into this issue as the plight of people crossing



at illegal points poses a danger of spreading the virus and may even expose women to rape, robbery and harassment among viles that happen in these areas,” read the statement.

The association said they were calling for a special arrangement for informal cross border traders to also access medical attention as some of the vendors have revealed that they cannot access medication in the country.

“We also propose a controlled movement of people between the two countries whereas immigration authorities can join hands in ensuring that there is smooth and safe crossing,” read the statement.

They also suggested that informal traders be issued with a special pass valid for a few hours,

allowing them to cross over to buy goods and return within stipulated time frames.

This special request from vendors comes after 35 people who were allegedly caught crossing the border illegally tested positive for coronavirus. Illegal cross border trading continues around gate seven, even though the police are making arrests. It is alleged that the smugglers are now staying in the bush or nearby rural areas.

Beitbridge border town, before the Covid-19 lock-down served an extra transit population of at least 10 000 people a day. Currently the town is catering for hundreds of returnees from South Africa at NSSA quarantine centre before they are dispatched to their respective provinces.

Covid-19 hotspot Byo suburbs revealed

FOUR high-density suburbs have been singled out the hotspots of the Covid-19 pandemic in Bulawayo, with authorities hinting that considerations were being put in place to introduce stiffer lockdown measures in those areas.

Bulawayo has the second highest Covid-19 cases in the country with figures released by the Ministry of Health and Child Care stating that as on Friday the city had 618 confirmed cases. Of these, 569 are local transmissions with 15 deaths recorded in the city. There were 2 296 confirmed cases countrywide on Friday with 32 deaths and 514 recoveries since the outbreak in the country on 20 March.

Health authorities in the city have since identified Cowdray Park, Magwegwe West, Nkulumane and Emganwini suburbs as having the highest number of infections while in terms of institutions, the hotspots have been identified as Mpilo Central Hospital, United Bulawayo Hospitals, Khami Maximum Prison and Bulawayo Prison. Nonetheless, it could not be established how many confirmed cases were attributed to each locality.

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“The hotspots that have been identified in the Metropolitan Province of Bulawayo are the two central hospitals, Mpilo and UBH, Khami Maximum Prison, Bulawayo Prison, Cowdray Park, Magwegwe West, Nkulumane and Emganwini suburbs. What we have done is that we have upped health education in these areas noting that this is key in public health intervention. Public Health Surveillance systems are currently in place to assist in the early detection, monitoring, prediction and prevention of human illness,” said Dr Sibanda.

He noted that of the confirmed cases 115 are health workers of which 51 are student nurses, 37 registered general nurses, seven nurse aids, five general hands, four doctors, three administration clerks, three medical students, a health information clerk, an environmental health technician, a community health nurse, a physiotherapist and a matron. A total of 51 percent of the cases are female, with the 25-34 years age group being the most affected.

Speaking at the same meeting, Minister of Local Government and Public Works, who leads the provincial Covid-19 response team, July Moyo said President Mnangagwa has since directed that all ministers who are assigned to provinces should interface with the provincial Covid-19 task force teams so that they can fully understand what is happening on the ground. He revealed that with the hotspots being identified in the city there was now a need to come up with specified lockdown measures to prevent the pandemic spreading to other areas.

“Bulawayo and Harare are the epicentres of the upswing in the number of positive cases. Officials have told us that in the beginning, here in Bulawayo, the number of cases were more concentrated in the eastern suburbs but now it has moved to the western suburbs with Magwegwe West, Nkulumane, Emganwini and Cowdray Park being the hotspots.

“We are now working on modalities where after we see that there is a concentration of Covid-19 cases in one area, as the President announced, we will look at these particular localities so that we isolate and lock them down so the virus does not spread, in this case we are talking of the four suburbs that have been identified as the epicentre of this pandemic in the city,” said Moyo.

He said the strategy they would adopt was that authorities, both administratively and political,

will embark on an awareness campaign, informing people about the dangers of the pandemic.

“We have also noted that the transmission might not be local but be of border jumpers who interface with the communities; therefore, we encourage the communities to report such individuals,” he said.

Minister Moyo also took the opportunity to hand over food parcels that were sourced by President Mnangagwa meant for frontline staff in the city. Of the consignment 1 000 will go to Mpilo, 400 to UBH and 300 to Thorngrove. Meanwhile, the Covid-19 deaths in the country are becoming worrisome as deaths are now being recorded almost on a daily basis. Last week saw seven people succumbing to the virus with four of them dying just in one day (Friday).

Mpilo Central Hospital acting chief executive officer Professor Solwayo Ngwenya said it was important to test all patients upon admission in hospital, as opposed to testing bodies upon death.

“We are saying that people are dying and not knowing that they have Covid-19 and they are only tested when they are dead already. So, it means the relatives bringing in that person to seek treatment are not aware that the patient has Covid-19. So, the infection keeps on spreading. A person from a funeral parlour can handle a deceased’s body and he or she is not aware of the cause of death and they go on to another place to collect a body. It’s a problem and spreads infection too,” he said.

On Friday, 172 cases tested positive for Covid-19 with 12 being returnees from South Africa, eight from Botswana and 152 locals who were isolated. Ninety of the local cases are contacts of known confirmed cases and investigations are underway to establish the source of infection for the remaining 62 cases, said the Ministry of Health and Child Care.

Source: Sunday News

Cities and Towns Update

NKAYI: Law enforcement by the security is yielding positive results in adherence to Covid-19 response regulations. A few people are seen moving around, on the other hand the curfew has brought everything to a halt. There is no transport, yet some people must go for medical check-ups. People are travelling long distances to the hospitals and at times arrive home after the stipulated curfew. Nurses in Nkayi have resumed duty.

BEITBRIDGE: Covid-19 cases continue to increase. 35 people who were caught crossing the border illegally, were tested and all of them were positive. Illegal trading continues around gate seven even though the police are making arrests, it is alleged that the smugglers are now staying

in the bush or nearby rural areas. Most churches gathered for their services however the confusion persists as some received messages that their churches were not open. The ZCA hub coordinator engaged with the Beitbridge district command who then gave authority for the churches to gather not more than 50 people as well as follow all the health guidelines.

HWANGE: Most people around the compounds walk around without masks. Many of the churches were doing online services as they were still confused if churches were banned or opened.

TSHOLOTSHO: Most of the churches were able to hold their services after the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) shared information on the current position of conducting services.

A few churches failed as they were awaiting communication from their headquarters.

HURUNGWE: A few churches managed to attend their services since churches were suspended a few days ago. Police officers and the army are patrolling the area. Very few people are seen not wearing face masks. Sanitization is done in every shop whereas social distancing is ignored by almost everyone including the police officers.

CHEGUTU: Most churches were open today and complied to the lockdown regulations but one of the churches in the township was visited by police and asked to close after some misunderstanding on interpreting the statutory instrument. Churches that did not open include Catholic church, Reformed Church and other smaller churches.