

SOUTH AFRICA

# 500 pupils quarantined after Covid-19 outbreak at Eastern Cape school



BY YOLISWA SOBUWA - 21 September 2020 - 08:09



Hundreds of students have been quarantined  
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The failure to practise social distancing and wear masks have been identified as the main factors behind the outbreak of coronavirus at an Eastern Cape school, where 98 learners tested positive for Covid-19.

The behaviour of the pupils at Ethembeni Senior Secondary School in Burgersdorp has come under scrutiny after about 500 pupils had to be quarantined following the outbreak.

Eastern Cape education spokesperson Mali Mtima confirmed that there was a problem of pupils taking off their masks outside the classroom.

"In this case two pupils went to test for Covid-19 but failed to inform the school. During the break they would mingle with other learners which is how the virus was spread. As a district we have recruited teacher assistants who will make sure that Covid-19 regulations are adhered to," Mtima said

An 18-year-old grade 12 pupil at the school told Sowetan that the virus was spread faster because "we only wear masks when we are inside the classroom and a lot of pupils do not observe social distancing".

Another grade 12 pupil who left her home for a quarantine site said she hoped they would be given a chance to write the exams.

"I did not have any symptoms even when I was tested at school on Wednesday last week, I didn't think much of it. However, my results came back positive on Friday and I was shocked and worried about my exams," she said.

A 17-year-old grade 10 pupil said: "We were told there were two grade 10 pupils who tested positive for Covid-19 and we also had to test. I was worried for my grandmother at home but luckily my results came back negative."

A teacher who asked to remain anonymous as he was not allowed to speak to the media said the outbreak would disturb the grade 12 pupils who were writing exams.

Eastern Cape education MEC Fundle Gade said a multi-departmental team consisting of the local municipality, and departments of health, public works and education had been established to manage the spread of the outbreak.

"The team had advised the department to allow grade 12 learners to write their exams since they are medically fit. However they will be isolated in Aliwal North where invigilators have been advised to put on personal protective equipment and scripts will be monitored for a specified period before being marked," he said.

Gade said there were also quarantine sites in Steynsburg for the grade 12 pupils who tested negative as they could be in the incubation phase.

Joe Gqabi municipal spokesperson Mandla Gceya said the mass outbreak at Ethembeni Secondary School holds dire consequences for Burgersdorp and surrounding areas as the pupils were in contact with their families and friends, which calls for a large number of primary contacts to be identified and traced.

Meanwhile, the department of basic education has also announced that 22,500 teachers who were granted approval for concession to work from home countrywide in terms of a collective agreement were expected to report for duty today.

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