

SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Town nightclub faces investigation over Covid-19 'super-spreader' event

13 October 2020 - 18:08

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After matric pupils partied at Cape Town bar on October 3, doctors in the southern suburbs reported a surge in Covid-19 infections, and 59 cases have been identified from that evening alone

Image: 123RF/Jarun Ontakrai

The Western Cape Liquor Authority and the police will launch an investigation into a Cape Town bar following reports that it is responsible for dozens of Covid-19 cases.

There have been about 63 new Covid-19 cases identified in the city's southern suburbs, mostly among matric pupils in some of the city's top schools. The infections have been traced to a party at the bar a week ago.

Western Cape premier Alan Winde said preliminary data indicated that of the 63 cases detected to date, 37 were matric pupils who attend schools in the southern suburbs. Most of the pupils attend private schools.

He said his office had been alerted that "the required regulations and the required safety behaviours were not adhered to in this case".

"There are other concerning allegations around this event, and we are now requesting a full investigation into this bar (club) in question, including by the police and the Western Cape Liquor Authority," Winde said.

The 63 cases were identified in the past week by the province's contact tracing teams after several GPs noticed a pattern among residents of similar age.

The investigation comes just hours after several schools in the southern suburbs warned parents and pupils that partying by some pupils could cost some matrics their future, because their final exams start on Monday.

The schools said partying at crowded nightclubs with no masks worn has put pupils at high risk of contracting Covid-19.

In a letter, Westerford High School principal Mark Smith raised concerns about a large gathering that took place at Tin Roof nightclub in Claremont on October 3, which is regarded as "a super-spreader" event.

"The event on October 3 is being regarded as 'a super-spreader' as 59 positive cases of Covid-19 have been identified from that evening alone. Most of the pupils present were matrics. As a consequence of the non-observance of safety protocols at that club, there are now a large number of matric pupils in neighbouring schools who have tested positive for Covid-19.

"We do not have any Covid cases at Westerford arising from that event, as far as we know."

The owner of Tin Roof, James Truter, has distanced his club from allegations that it is a super-spreader venue.

"There's been zero negligence on our part. The Saturday of October 3 was a normal trading day with no special performances or special event of any sort."

Truter said he has heard about several parties, including house parties in the Claremont area, that were attended by young people who later moved to his establishment for an after-party. He denied allegations that his nightclub, which is currently trading only as a bar, attracted crowds.

"Our normal population certificate permits us to have 190 people, but since we've reopened we only take about 120 patrons max, which is less than two-thirds of our total capacity. We haven't had any bigger crowd than this. Instead we've chased people home when queues are growing long outside. We haven't breached any Covid-19 regulations. Instead we've gone the extra mile by doing temperature checks of patrons and taking down names and contact details of patrons, something we are not required to do by law."

A group of doctors who advise local high schools on Covid-19 management – including SACS, Bishops Diocesan College, Westerford, Rustenburg Girls, Rondebosch Boys and Springfield Convent – have also warned matric pupils to keep safe during this time so they can write their final exams.

"Unfortunately, we have observed individuals testing positive at several schools in the past two weeks after a brief reduction in numbers. Infection prevention and control is in place in all schools and the risk of infection is likely higher in the community than at school," the doctors noted.

As schools entered the most important part of the academic year, which is the matric exams, the doctors urged pupils to limit socialising outside school and to keep their meetings outside schools to a maximum of four friends, and mainly outdoors. Pupils should avoid indoor parties and sleep-overs, and should postpone visits until after their exams. They have been urged to exercise to help manage stress, and to social distance.

"We are all tired of Covid-19 and we know you are too. We have missed big birthday celebrations, dances, hanging out with friends, the list goes on," said the doctors.

The schools in the southern suburbs ordered all pupils who attended the super-spreader event to be tested for Covid-19.

"I appeal in the strongest terms to our pupils and parents to be aware at all times of the extremely high risk of infection when health and safety measures are not being followed, in particular when masks are not being worn," said Smith.

"To the matrics: you need to be willing – you must be willing – to forego the short-term pleasures of partying until the final examinations are behind you.

"To pupils from other grades who are frequenting parties you, too, are placing our school community at risk, especially the matrics who are on the verge of such important exams. We must all adhere to our safety protocols while at school, when in public, and when at home. In so doing, we will ensure we all stay Covid-free," he said in the letter to parents and pupils.

Smith told TimesLIVE the warning was in the best interests of fellow pupils and teachers who were at high risk of developing complications from Covid-19. He said pupils who missed some of the final exams due to illness would not be able to matriculate, and "we want to avoid this happening".

While many pupils would probably be asymptomatic, Smith said the school was “doing everything to make the school environment as safe as possible for everyone”.

Winde said while the new cluster of cases is not an indication of a second wave, “it is one cluster that demonstrates the potential for spread that continues even while our hospitalisations and deaths stabilise”.

“We are nevertheless extremely worried that this particular event is indicative of younger residents not adhering to the important behaviours we need to prevent a new spike of infections. It is also indicative of some establishments not following the important health and safety guidelines, as well as the legal regulations which have been put in place to stop the spread,” he said.

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