# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 1304**

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**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 20)**

**Mr H Ismail (DA) to ask the Minister of Health:**

(1) What is the extent of the current backlog in the processing of tests for the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in each province;

(2) what is the average number of days that it takes to process SARS-CoV-2 tests in each province?

###### NW1672E

**REPLY:**

1. Despite the efforts to increase testing capacity in all provinces, the National Health Laboratory Services (NHLS) experienced an accumulation of unprocessed specimens (backlogs), since the beginning of May 2020 when provinces embarked on mass testing, due to the global shortage of test kits.

The NHLS initiated mitigation plans to try and reduce the backlog. The strategy the NHLS used was to prioritize the provinces where there was a high positivity rate, and clear the backlogs. The strategy implemented has successfully reduced the backlog in most provinces. The table below shows that currently three provinces have backlogs. The NHLS is working actively with the provinces to address this backlog.

The Western Cape, Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and North West currently do not have any backlogs.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Region | 09-May-20 | 14-May-20 | 21-May-20 | 25-May-20 | 28-May-20 | 04-Jun-20 | 11-Jun-20 | 16-Jun-20 | 07-Jul-20 |
| Eastern Cape | 8 350 | 7 000 | 23 000 | 22 802 | 21 000 | 21 355 | 18 254 | 15 501 | 9490 |
| Free State | 200 | 4 300 | 6 000 | 8 800 | 1 767 | 0 |  0 |  0 | 0 |
| Gauteng | 15 000 | 13 000 | 23 000 | 24 076 | 24 000 | 28 395 | 20 978 | 27 000 | 13091 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 12 000 | 18 000 | 28 000 | 22 802 | 22 000 | 20 751 | 14 802 | 12 400 | 3 500 |
| Western Cape | 14 000 | 16 630 | 21 000 | 18 000 | 15 000 | 10 568 | 3 000 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **49 550** | **58 930** | **101 000** | **96 480** | **83 767** | **81 069** | **57 034** | **54 901** | **26 081** |

**Reduction of Backlog**

The reduction in the backlog has been achieved though the following:

* Re-prioritizing test kits to provinces with high positivity rates.
* A slightly improved supply of extraction kits.
* Utilizing innovative methods for extracting the RNA from the virus through lysis and heat activation, to reduce the dependency on extraction kits.
* Improved workflow in laboratories.
* Most importantly, the commitment and hard work of the staff.

(2) The reduction in the backlogs as well as prioritizations done by the laboratory and health facilities, and the turn-around time has improved in a number of provinces. Western Cape for example is currently processing specimens in less than 48 hours and in many instances in 24 hours.

The average turnaround time, in days, is tabulated below 28 June – 04 July 2020:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Province Name** | **Average turnaround time in days** |
| EASTERN CAPE | 5 |
| FREE STATE | 2 |
| GAUTENG | 5 |
| KWAZULU-NATAL | 8 |
| LIMPOPO | 3 |
| MPUMALANGA | 4 |
| NORTH WEST | 4 |
| NORTHERN CAPE | 3 |
| WESTERN CAPE | 2 |

A reasonable time to clear a sample through the laboratory, if all reagents (test kits) and resources are available is 48 hours (2days)-72 hours (3 days).

END.