# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 769**

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**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 14)**

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

(1) In light of the shortage of test kits to test for the presence of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, which causes the Covid-19 disease, what steps is he taking in this regard;

(2) whether he or his department has taken any steps to reduce the turnaround time of four to five days for the release of the results; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;

(3) whether he intends to take any steps with regard to the general shortage of test kits and the very limited quantities available for testing in the testing sites and mass-screening areas which cause delays for effective testing; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant steps?

###### NW971E

**REPLY:**

1. There is a global need for test kits with countries in the north taking up the majority of the kits that are available given the large number of positive patients in these countries. This has resulted in a global shortage of test kits. The Department has worked with the National Health Laboratory Service to increase the number of test kits that are available to South Africa. The Minister has engaged with some of the manufacturers of test kits to encourage them to increase the number of test kits that they supply to South Africa. A challenge is that the limited number of flights from countries that manufacture the test kits adds to the challenges being experienced.

(2) Yes, steps have been taken to reduce the turnaround time. In-hospital admission, patients under investigation are prioritised, and the turnaround time for these patients will be reduced to 48 hours. The turnaround time for the other samples are being addressed through utilisation of academic platform testing sites and private laboratories, as well as increased output at NHLS laboratories. Over the last week the number of tests have increased from 51,000/week to about 60,000/week.

As a result of the global shortage of COVID-19 test kits, including extraction kits, the criteria for testing has been amended. The Department has prioritised testing of patients in hospitals with respiratory conditions, as well as people who have had contact with a known positive patient as well as health care workers. As soon as serological (antibody) tests are registered by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAPHRA) these will be used for population level surveillance to get prevalence rates.

(3) As noted above, the criteria for testing have been changed. We have halted mass testing as the target that was set of 14 million people screened through community screening has been achieved and we have moved to targeted screening and testing. In addition, as mentioned the number of laboratories that test for COVID-19 has increased. With respect to antibody testing, the NHLS and SAPHRA are fast tracking the validation and registration of these tests. However, it should be noted that these tests will largely be used for surveillance with the PCR test used to test individual patients for acute infections.

END.