

MEDIA RELEASE	COVID-19: PSA advises Government to continue efforts to curb infections
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The PSA (Public Servants Association) has called on government to continue assisting to curb the spread of the second wave of COVID-19 infections by permitting public servants who are able to do so under alert level 1 to work from home.

The PSA, which represents some 240 000 public-sector employees, in a letter to the Director-General of the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), Ms Yoliswa Makhasi, pointed out that during the initial lockdown proclaimed by President Cyril Ramaphosa in March 2020, the Public Service as a responsible employer initiated a remote-work approach. This ensured that the Public Service did not contribute to the spread of COVID-19 and greatly assisted the country in curbing the spread of the virus.

With the easing of the lockdown level to alert level 1, the Public Service increased employees' presence at work. In December 2020, it was announced by the Minister of Health that the country was experiencing a second wave of COVID-19 infections with the daily infection rate exceeding that of the first phase. This necessitated the President to announce a return to lockdown level three. In view of these circumstances, the PSA proposed to the DPSA that the Public Service should again play its part in curbing the spread of COVID-19 by implementing remote work for all employees who can do so. The PSA further proposed that a rotation of officials per groups be implemented as a proactive approach to stop the rapid spread of infections for service departments such as the Department of Home Affairs, SASSA, Correctional Services, etc., to ensure that a second layer of officials is available should there be a need to quarantine a number of officials at once.

The recent announcement by President Ramaphosa to move the country to alert level 1 will see more public service employees returning to work. The PSA is aware that the economy and service delivery of the country need to be kick started but the Union is extremely concerned about Government's ability to ensure its employees' safety. Several departments still do not have the necessary infrastructure and protective personal equipment to ensure that employees maintain social distancing and adhere to health protocols. A rushed full return to work during this critical period will unnecessarily expose employees with the potential to further fuel the infection rate in workplaces and communities.

The PSA, for these reasons and other well-documented concerns about the health and safety of public servants as drivers of crucial service delivery during the state of disaster, appeals to Government to allow public servants to continue working remotely.

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