

MEDIA RELEASE	COVID-19: PSA warns that government departments are ill-prepared
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The Public Servants Association (PSA), as representative Union of more than 240 000 public-sector employees is deeply concerned that state departments are not yet ready for employees' return to work and are often blatantly disregarding COVID-19 regulations.

Departments are not complying with safety regulations to combat the infection rate in terms of Occupational Health and Safety Measures in Workplaces issued by the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) and Department of Public Service and Administration Circular 18 of 2020. In a seemingly blatant disregard or misconception by many government departments for the Regulations issued by the President, there is a rushing to re-open offices without ensuring compliance with level-4 requirements intended to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus.

The PSA is flooded with reports from its members across the country that many departments are not compliant with the provisions of the amended Regulations related to personal protective equipment (PPE), deep cleaning of offices, etc. to protect employees and members of the public from exposure the COVID-19 virus. In various instances, Inspectors from the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) had to be called to close non-compliant workplaces. The PSA is furthermore concerned that the DEL's capacity to deal with the multitude of complaints.

The PSA had to intervene at the Department of Defence in Pretoria on 5 May when employees were instructed to report for duty whilst none of the safety regulations was complied with. Some employers are arrogantly threatening employees should they fail to report for duty. The PSA is concerned that the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has failed to screen employees and conduct deep cleaning. In some offices, the Department recalled the full staff complement, despite regulations in this regard. The directive clearly indicates that employees who can work from home, must be allowed to do so to ensure the practice of social distancing. All these measures were apparently disregarded by the Department at DHA offices in, Lindela , Northern Cape , Mpumalanga , Giyani, Polokwane, Malamulele, Phalaborwa, Mokopane, Jane Furse and Vhembe districts. The directive indicated that apart from the screening of workers and deep cleaning, employers must conduct a risk assessment, educate, and communicate rules, ensure staggered return of workers, provide PPE, and install distance markers at receptions and areas where queues are envisaged. The PSA calls upon the DHA to withdraw the recall of employees to work and ensure compliance with safety regulations. Failure to do, will reverse the gains of lockdown and can rapidly increase the number of infections in communities and workplaces ..

The PSA cannot allow employees to return to workplaces that do not meet the requirements announced by various Ministers to curb the spread of the virus. A warning was already issued by the President that the infection rate is set to worsen. The PSA has warned employers against the premature recalling of employees without the necessary preparation. The PSA calls upon Ministers and MECs to lead by the same example by enforcing compliance with regulations by CEOs and Directors-General.

The PSA, at the same time, applauds the Free State Provincial Administration for considering the health and safety of its employees and the public by means of maintaining level-5 status until departments are fully compliant with level-4 measures.

State resources are limited, and poor decisions taken by those who need to execute plans in line with level-4 lockdown will have a disastrous impact on South Africans. The PSA urges the Auditor-General to prepare a special program on procurement of PPE and related items. It must also be ensured that there is no irregular conduct in this regard. Employees found wanting must be held accountable and dealt with decisively to deter others from engaging in similar practices.

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