

MEDIA STATEMENT

MINERALS COUNCIL POSITION ON COVID-19

Johannesburg, 6 March 2020: In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. This has consequences for individual health, workplace impact and general economic impact on countries.

In early February 2020 the Minerals Council provided members with material on mitigation measures against the virus. The materials were based on communication from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), materials provided by the WHO, and were targeted at employees and translated into Afrikaans, isiZulu and Sesotho.

As concern around the disease has intensified, so the Minerals Council and its members have continued to monitor the situation globally and nationally; to engage and align fully with the NICD planning for businesses and occupational health settings; and to develop plans to reduce and mitigate its impact. That the virus has now been confirmed to have arrived in South Africa emphasises the importance of taking these actions.

Planning for and mitigating the impact on the mining sector

We recognise that the mining sector has special circumstances that could make it vulnerable to transmission of infectious diseases such as COVID-19. Employees congregate in areas of work, and travel in close proximity. As mining often involves physical activity, there could be a high degree of exposure to the virus simply through contact with people, machinery and equipment. Mining executives and officials who visit offshore operations are at risk of contracting the virus in other countries and bringing the infection into South African mines.

On the other hand, the mining industry has extensive and existing systems in place to deal with communicable diseases, the monitoring of health and provision of healthcare.

The Minerals Council has adopted a nine-point action plan that involves the following:



- Employee education and health promotion
- Health worker readiness
- Ensuring access to consumables (masks, sanitisers, testing kits) and hardware (such as temperature monitors)
- Proactive influenza vaccination, which the industry undertakes and promotes every year
- Understanding the potential impact on employees who may be immuno-compromised
- Case definition and management
- Isolation of employees should the need arise
- Travel advice
- Reporting and communication

The Minerals Council also stands ready to work with all relevant parts of government to manage the spread of the virus.

Potential impact on the industry

The potential impact on the industry is difficult to quantify.

- One impact would be the delay in exports of materials to significantly-affected markets. This would be a timing issue as it is assumed that the ports and markets will reopen at some stage.
- Demand for some commodities could be affected if growth in significantly-affected markets is constrained or delayed. On the other hand, the price of gold would likely be supported in the context of global uncertainty.
- From an internal perspective, the industry is putting in place risk-mitigating measures to rapidly identify any cases of the virus, to ensure rapid isolation and contact tracing, and could – if it was necessary – mobilise large-scale medical facilities.

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