

Smoking a no-go in fight against virus, experts say

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Nelson Mandela Bay pulmonologist Dr Luke Krige says smokers are definitely more vulnerable to complications should they contract Covid-19.

Smoking was an addiction and it should be banned indefinitely, he said.

Because Covid-19 affected the lungs, causing breathing problems, Krige said, a smoker's risk of developing complications was far higher than that of a non-smoker because the virus attacked the lungs.

Smokers were also more susceptible to heart disease on top of possibly having a limited lung capacity.

And the World Health Organisation (WHO) agrees with his sentiments.

According to the WHO, smokers are likely to be more vulnerable to Covid-19 as the act of smoking means that fingers, and possibly contaminated cigarettes, are in contact with lips, which increases the possibility of virus transmission from the hand to mouth.

Smokers may also already have lung disease or reduced lung capacity, which would greatly increase risk of serious illness, the WHO said on its website.

“Conditions that increase oxygen needs or reduce the ability of the body to use it properly will put patients at higher risk of serious lung conditions such as pneumonia,” the organisation said.

But Krige also stressed that with people now buying tobacco on the black market, making cigarettes more expensive, more people were now sharing smokes and making their risk of infection even greater.

For each job saved in manufacturing, the Eastern Cape provincial government will reward companies with R10,000.

This proposal was included in premier Oscar Mabuyane's Covid-19 containment and mitigation plan, which he presented to President Cyril Ramaphosa at Livingstone Hospital on Thursday.

The premier said the bonus scheme was among the incentives the provincial government could offer companies to retain jobs in the province.

The Eastern Cape had been bleeding jobs even before the national coronavirus lockdown, with the unemployment rate climbing three percentage points to 39.5% between October and December 2019.

“This challenge of Covid-19 presents us with an opportunity to turn around the economy of the province,” Mabuyane said.

“If you look at manufacturing, textile and ... agriculture with the huge arable land, the sector should not only be contributing 5.5% in terms of economic growth in the province.”

Under the incentive programme for manufacturing, which is funded by the provincial jobs stimulus fund, Mabuyane's government had identified 16 companies which qualified for the job-retention bonus.

At least 1,051 jobs would potentially be saved, while another 12 applications were still being considered.

Mabuyane said R63m had been made available to fund the bonus scheme.

He said several measures were being put in place to assist companies to get back to business and create jobs.

“We also have other mechanisms such as your local and regional economic development fund that targets SMMEs, especially the youth, to ensure they are supported.”

The budget for the economic development fund is R21m.

“We also have the Isiqalo Youth Fund where we put R25m annually to support [youth-owned companies’] ideas,” he said.

Presenting a sample of bankable catalytic projects in the agricultural sector in the Chris Hani district municipality, OR Tambo municipality and Amathole municipality, Mabuyane told Ramaphosa that the province needed R1bn to executive the projects.

They ranged from vegetable farming to citrus, macadamias, tropical fruits and dairy projects.

“We need a couple of billion, president, but we’ll take just R1bn for now,” Mabuyane said.

Ramaphosa expressed satisfaction with Mabuyane’s presentation.

He said the pandemic had galvanised the government to look at real issues and crush poverty to which many South Africans were being subjected.

“Covid-19 is building capacity in the state, enabling us to be much more focused and do right by the people of SA,” he