



**NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH**

Division of the National Health Laboratory Service



COVID-19 Occupational Health Surveillance System (OHSS) for South African Workplaces

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27 May 2021

Healthy, Safe, Happy & Sustainable Workplaces

PROMOTING DECENT WORK THROUGH CUTTING EDGE RESEARCH, SPECIALISED SERVICES, INFORMATION, TEACHING AND TRAINING



Surveillance





Public Health Surveillance

The ongoing systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of health data, essential to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public health practice, closely integrated with the timely dissemination to those who need to know.

World Health Organization, 2000

Introduction

- The ongoing Covid-19 data collection system from workplaces for analysis, interpretation, essential for planning, implementation and evaluation of occupational health interventions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- OHSS officially commenced on 1 October 2020.
- OHSS was initiated by the NDoH (National Department of Health) in partnership with:
 - NIOH (National Institute for Occupational Health)
 - NICD (National Institute for Communicable Diseases)
 - CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research)
 - B4SA (Business for South Africa)
 - Occupational Medicine Specialists from several universities
 - Several Major Private Sector Corporations

How this came about?

- With the country back at work, there was an increased need for a systematic collection of Covid-19 data in the workplaces in order to timeously identify and appropriately intervene in workplaces with high Covid-19 infections.
- A consolidated Covid-19 Directive on Health and Safety in the Workplace. R639 was issued on 28 September 2020, under Regulation 4(10) of the National Disaster Regulations.
- Directs employers with > 50 employees to collect Covid-19 related data and submit to NIOH.
- Data to be collected:
 - Symptomatic employee data weekly
 - Vulnerability status of employees (once off submission, updated as required)
 - Positive case data-
 - Return to work/ health outcomes of positive cases

Aims/objectives

- Develop a framework for a COVID 19 surveillance model for monitoring workers in various economic sectors, both in the public and private sector
- Early identification of sectors/companies and occupational groups at high risk of infection so as to inform appropriate interventions (e g policy, programs, resources)
- Evaluate the impact of the COVID 19 interventions in the workplace
- Determine the human resource and economic impact of COVID 19 on the various sectors
- To provide regular updates on the trajectory of the pandemic in various economic sectors nationally
- Identification of key scientific questions requiring further investigation

OHSS Covid-19 data management

Confidentiality

- Data is stored in the OHSS data lake at NIOH.
- Data in the data lake is anonymised and any identifying information removed after a period of 6 weeks.
- All OHSS data collected by NIOH is securely stored and processed in the NIOH data centre.
- All systems used for data collection, storage, and processes are assessed on regular basis for any security threats.

Data received is used to:

- Monitor trends in the disease.
- Identify workplace risk factors.
- Design effective intervention strategies.

Profiles of businesses registered on OHSS after 6 months (31/03/2021)

- Total businesses registered on OHSS : 3111
- % of all businesses in South Africa: 0.1%

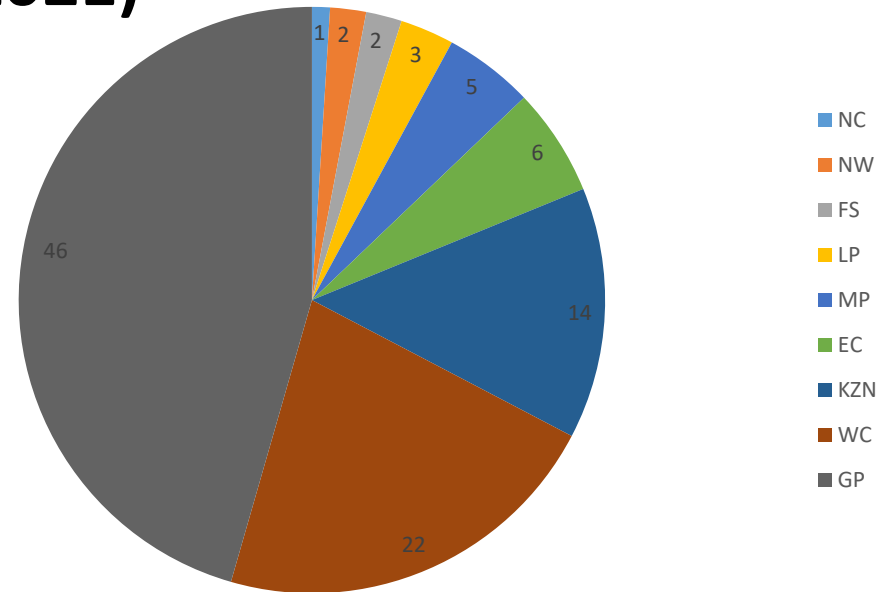
(December 2020 CIPC registered companies total: 2 317 429, however note that some maybe dormant businesses)

Total Employees: 1 829 897 registered on OHSS

% of all formally employed in SA: 13%

(14,1 million employees -LABOUR FORCE SURVEY Sept 2020- approximately 10 million formally employed)

Profiles of businesses registered on OHSS at 6 months (31/03/2021)

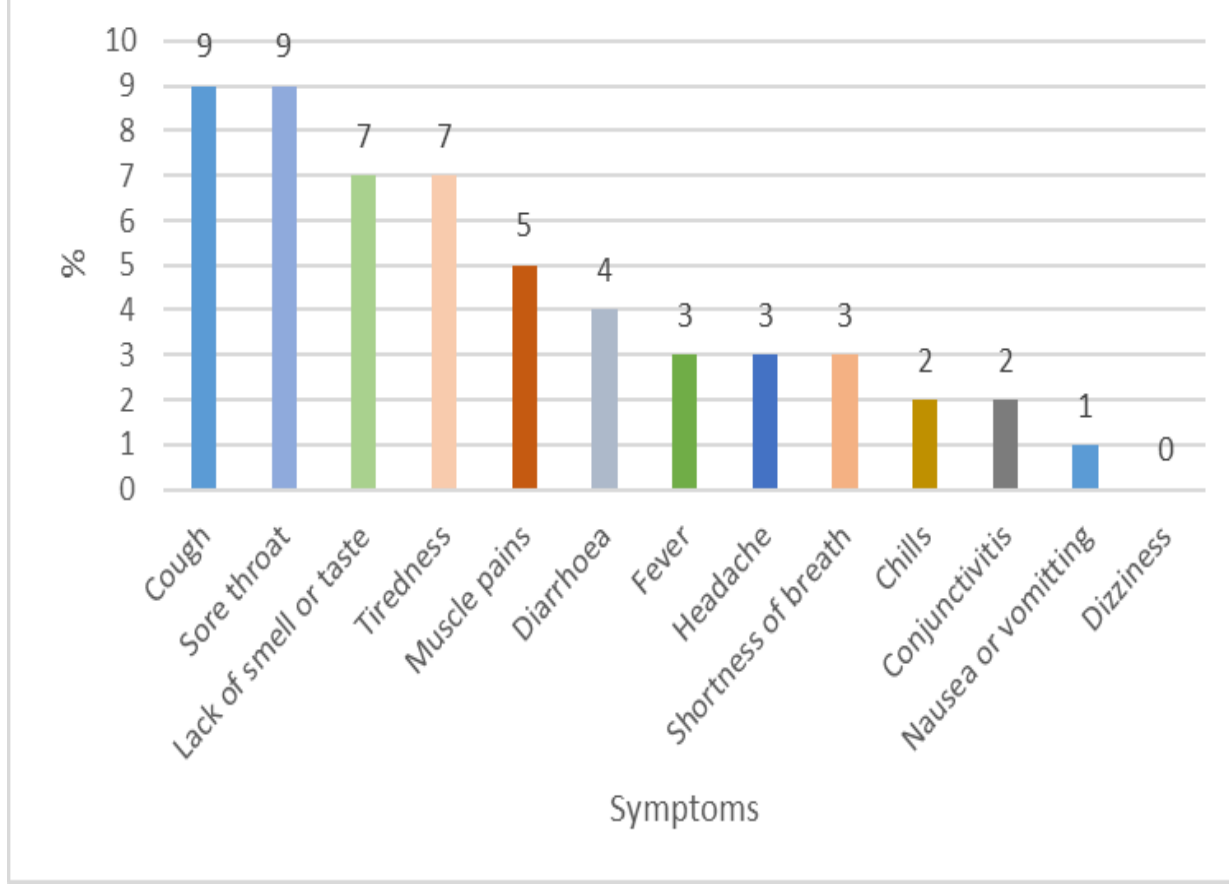


- Gauteng has the highest proportion of registered businesses (46%), followed by Western Cape (22%) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (14%).
- Majority of registered businesses complying with submission requirements are in the Retail trade in food and beverages sector.
- However, the proportion of registered businesses submitting data is still not optimal.

Data received at 6 months (31/03/2021)

Symptom Screening:

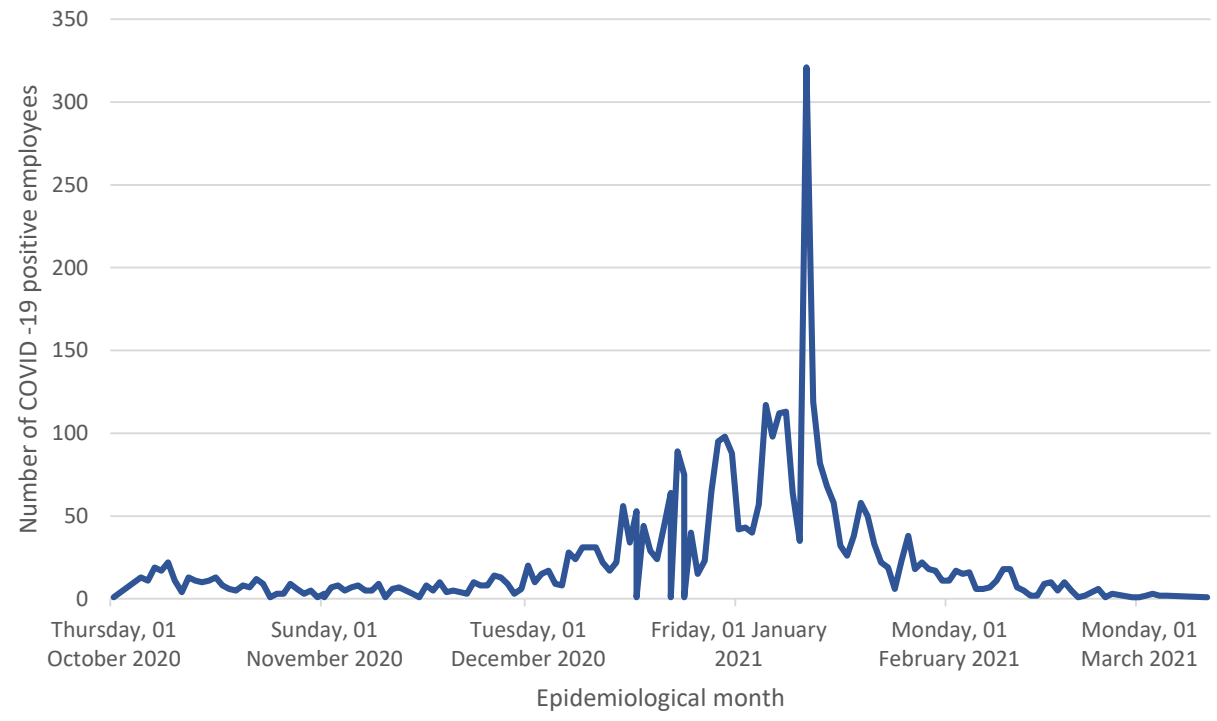
- Approximately 201 (6.5%) businesses have submitted data on symptomatic employees during this period.
- The most common symptoms included cough and sore throat (9% each), followed by anosmia and tiredness



Data received at 6 months (31/03/2021)

Positive cases:

- 3,704 positive COVID-19 cases were reported
- majority from Gauteng (48,2%), followed by Western Cape (18.6%) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (12.4%).
- sectors reporting the largest number of cases included the banking and insurance sector (57,0%) followed by the health and social sector (27,3%).
- majority of COVID-19 positive workers were employed as clerical support workers (30%).
- A workplace contact was report in 33% of positive cases.
- 89%) were symptomatic at the time of diagnosis.
- 2,617 (70.6%) had returned to work
- 38 (1.5%) deaths reported
- 195 (7.5%) employees had been hospitalised.



Number of reported COVID-19 positive employees by epidemiological month in South Africa (1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021)

Concerns & Recommendations

Concerns:

- <1% of business registered covering 13% of workers (formal sector).
- The data presented does not represent the true disease burden experienced by workers in the country.

Recommendations

- **Increase awareness:** Through social media, webinars, Hotline etc.
- **Enforcement** by Department of Employment and Labour inspectors

NB: Directive R.342 regarding Covid-19 Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme(C19 TERS)

Covid-19 TERS update (08/04/2021)

In order to prove that an employer is unable to make alternative arrangements for vulnerable employees to work from home or take alternative measures, and to prove that an employee is in quarantine or isolation and is entitled to benefits the employer;

- ❖ Must submit the required data to the National Institute for Occupational Health in the manner set out in the National Department of Health Guidelines.

Acknowledgements:

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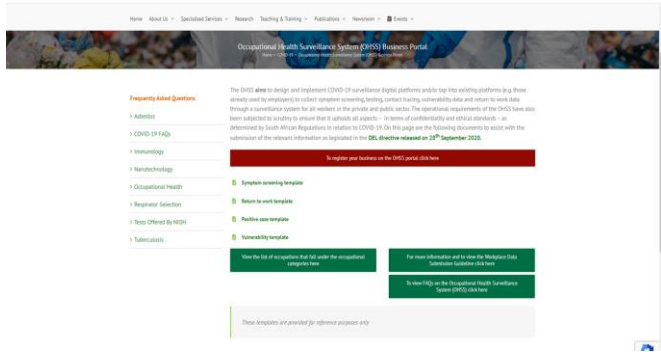
Email: OHSworkplace@nioh.ac.za
ohssupport@nioh.ac.za

OHSS Hotline: 0723215503/ 0713981169

Registration Portal: <https://ohss.nioh.ac.za>

Information about OHSS:

<https://www.nioh.ac.za/covid-19/occupational-health-surveillance-system-ohss-business-portal/>



The End

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