



## THE SECOND WAVE AND NEW COVID-19 VARIANT – RETURNING TO SCHOOL

**Please note: this information is correct on 5th February 2021.**

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## THE SECOND COVID-19 WAVE

A COVID-19 “second wave” has been experienced in South Africa since November 2020, with a big increase in numbers of people testing positive, as well as hospitalisations and deaths. The new 501Y.V2 COVID-19 virus mutation (or variant virus) which was identified in late 2020, is believed to be part of the reason for this resurgence.

### WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE NEW 501Y.V2 COVID-19 VARIANT?

The COVID-19 501Y.V2 variant seems to spread more easily and much faster than previous variants. However, according to scientists and public health experts, it is not causing more severe illness.

### WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH THE SECOND COVID-19 WAVE?

It is hard to correctly predict how long the second wave will last, because it is being driven by the new variant. However, prominent scientist, Professor Abdool Carrim has stated that he believes it will end more quickly than the first wave did. Several provinces (including the Eastern and Western Cape) have already reached the peak of the second wave and are experiencing a decline in new infections.

### ARE CHILDREN MORE AT RISK WITH THE NEW VARIANT OF COVID-19?

The South African Paediatric association has said that despite the new COVID-19 variant, children were still much less likely than adults to catch it and the figures of children developing severe symptoms are very low.

### IF CHILDREN DO GET INFECTED, ARE THE SYMPTOMS MORE SEVERE?

No. As with the original COVID-19 virus, children who are infected are likely to either not feel sick at all or only have very mild symptoms.

### IS THERE A DIFFERENCE IN TERMS OF INFECTION RISK IN DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS:

The children least likely to be infected and affected are the youngest; pre-schoolers the least and primary school learners less than those at high schools.





## WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS AROUND MASK-WEARING FOR CHILDREN?

WHO guidelines recommend that children 6 years and older should wear a face mask, however the SA guidelines require that children aged between 2 and 5 years who can tolerate wearing a mask should do so when outside of their home. It is not recommended that children young than 2 years wear a mask, as it could be dangerous.

Masks must be worn at all times at school, except if eating or drinking. Masks must also be worn if children are using public transport. Social distancing also needs to be observed. Children must be encouraged to wash hands / sanitize regularly.

## IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN TO RETURN TO SCHOOL?

***The South African Paediatric Association (SAPA) says it is better for most children to be at school.***

It is understandable that parents may feel worried about their children returning to school. But, it's important to note children are less likely than adults to catch COVID-19 and most children will not be sick at all or will only have a mild flu-like illness. Children with asthma, allergies and HIV (on treatment) can go to school. If a child has any other illnesses, discuss the risk of going to school with their doctor.

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