

INDUSTRY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Fact sheet

July 2021



MINERALS COUNCIL
SOUTH AFRICA



Impala Platinum

Sustained,
collaborative
and intensive
effort to
address
COVID-19

By the time the WHO had declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020, the Minerals Council and the CEOs of member companies were already alert to this threat and were adopting a risk-based approach in response.

In early February 2020, the Minerals Council developed and issued its first advisories to members on COVID-19, combined with communications material for employees.



10 POINT PLAN

Just a week after the WHO declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, the Minerals Council adopted its COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, which later became known as the 10-Point Action Plan. These steps included:

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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 immunocompromised
- 

Case definition and management of suspected cases or contacts of cases
- 

Isolation of employees, should the need arise
- 

Travel advice
- 

Reporting and communication in the industry in the event of a case
- 

Monitoring



Mining industry action plan on COVID-19
<https://bit.ly/33qIKKJ>



Standard Operating Procedure

By the end of March, the Minerals Council had published a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that provided for processes before employees arrive at work, after they arrive at work, isolation areas and follow up, continuous measures to deal with COVID-19 and reporting. The Minerals Council's SOP later became the basis for the Guidelines for a Mandatory Code of Practice to Mitigate and Manage the Outbreak of COVID-19 published by the Chief Inspector of Mines in May 2020.



 **Standard Operating Procedure**
<https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/minerals-council-position-on-covid-19>



Recovery from the lockdown


The release of the SOP coincided with the announcement by President Ramaphosa of a national lockdown that resulted in the significant scaling down of mining activities. Only operations supplying Eskom and the synfuels industry continued to operate to ensure energy security. Value-adding mining infrastructure, especially refineries and smelters that could not easily be switched on and off, also continued to operate, while ensuring that due care was taken with preventative and monitoring measures to protect the staff involved. Further, activities that continued involved internal essential services, including security, ventilation, cooling and pumping, refrigeration, tailings facilities, specialised maintenance, the provision of water and other supplies to communities as well as services to staff residences, where required.

The partial and increasing resumption of mining activities began following an announcement by the President on 23 April 2020 and was made possible through the effective measures put in place by the industry to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and the collaboration between the DMRE, unions and companies in implementing and observing strict protocols and restrictions.



Protection of vulnerable employees

Even when the industry was allowed to ramp up to full capacity, vulnerable employees continued to be assessed under the Minerals Council's Guidance on COVID-19 and Vulnerable Populations, encouraging companies to take informed decisions in managing employees who were vulnerable to COVID-19.

 **Guidance on COVID-19 and vulnerable populations**
<https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/downloads/send/68-covid-19/1066-infographic-guidance-on-covid-19-and-vulnerable-populations>



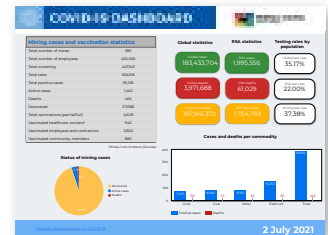
The driver behind the industry's high testing rates that have been sustained throughout the pandemic is the belief that testing is a fundamental part of any country's response, in the knowledge that those countries that have been able to test more comprehensively have had greater success in flattening the COVID-19 curve.



Collating and using information

From the beginning of the outbreak of the pandemic, the Minerals Council developed tools for collating information on cases, screening and testing, and deaths, and has reported these transparently and regularly on its website's COVID-19 portal: www.mineralscouncil.org.za/minerals-council-position-on-covid-19. More than that, data and data analysis has been used as a fundamental tool in understanding the impact of the pandemic, its patterns and for early warning signs of potential outbreaks.

This COVID-19 dashboard is updated every weekday



 **COVID-19 dashboard**
<https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/minerals-council-position-on-covid-19>

COVID-19 statistics in the industry

In addition to maintaining the hygiene protocols, every day each of the industry's 450,000 employees are being screened and, where necessary, tested.

Since screening and testing began early last year, as of 2 July 2021, 168,206 tests have been carried out on employees. That's a testing rate of 37.4% of the workforce, compared with 22% of South Africa's population as a whole.

The industry made a positive impact on the country's testing capacity in the period when it was stretched, and we enhanced capacity in mining communities specifically.

It is also notable that the high quality of medical care provided to employees has meant that deaths as a proportion of positive cases, at 1.19% by latest measure, is only just over a third of the 3.09% national average.

Nonetheless, 466 colleagues have been lost to COVID-19 complications, with a notable increase in numbers at the time of writing in the midst of the third wave. The number of recorded cases in mining surged along with the surge in the country as a whole. That is why the industry is highly conscious that it is necessary to remain vigilant. We cannot ease up in any way. We need to continue taking non-pharmaceutical interventions as seriously as we did at the very beginning of the pandemic.



Increasing testing

By September 2020, it had become clear that the existing testing resources, both public and private, were severely constrained. As a result, the Minerals Council, together with its members, sought to increase its COVID-19 testing capacity, both for companies and in support of the country's overall testing imperative.

The driver behind the industry's high testing rates that have been sustained throughout the pandemic is the belief that testing is a fundamental part of any country's response, in the knowledge that those countries that have been able to test more comprehensively have had greater success in flattening the COVID-19 curve. Any individual who tests positive can be isolated until he or she recovers, and his or her contacts may be traced and similarly tested and isolated, effectively reducing the rate of transmission. Further, appropriate testing will mean that individuals, especially those who are potentially vulnerable, may receive the medical treatment they need as soon as possible.

The industry has been guided by the criteria stipulated by the National Institute of Communicable Diseases, and this guidance is the minimum standard with which the industry complies. But given the exigencies that exist within the mining operations themselves, and the fact that the nature of the pandemic has seen a high level of asymptomatic cases, the mining industry at times modified its protocols. Several mining companies procured and established their own testing capacity (machines, testing kits and reagents, and qualified staff), or entered into arrangements with private facilities to secure access to increased testing capacity.



Leadership

A hallmark of the industry's response to COVID-19 has been the intensity of leadership focus and the range of disciplines involved. COVID-19 has been considered and discussed at every Minerals Council Board meeting since March 2020 and has been the subject of several dedicated Board meetings. The CEO Zero Harm Forum has taken a very active role in addressing COVID-19 with:

An increased intensity of meetings and focus on addressing the pandemic

The aim of saving lives and livelihoods with empathy and care

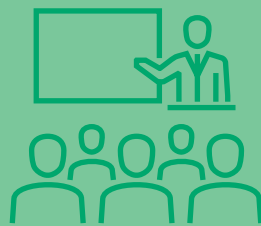
In line with the forum's compact that health and safety start with CEOs, they shared and challenged each other in-depth on

all aspects of managing this new risk, thus accelerating the learning curve at executive level throughout the industry.

A COVID-19 industry working group was convened from May 2020 to February 2021, followed by the establishment of eight regional working groups covering mining operations in Gauteng, Northern Cape, Western Cape, Free State, North West, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. The meetings were convened to:

- Share company testing strategies
- Provide medical updates on COVID-19
- Facilitate greater cooperation for isolation and quarantine facilities
- Convey latest information on COVID-19 treatment and management

In the national and regional working groups, various COVID-19 updates such as on testing strategies and protocols, global vaccines under development, positive COVID-19 cases disaggregated across mining commodities, have been provided to companies. The advantage of the regional cluster approach was demonstrated in joint support for isolation, quarantine and hospital facilities, and partnerships to facilitate additional testing capacity to the industry.



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Fundamental research

Very early on in the pandemic, the CEO Zero Harm Forum took the decision to re-allocate research funding to focus on three COVID-19-related initiatives in order to support the mining industry and others in dealing with the impact of COVID-19.

Three research streams were approved:

1. To understand the nature of COVID-19
2. How to change behaviours to stop the spread of the virus
3. A geographic information system (GIS) mapping system to enhance decision-making

1

Several discrete research projects were undertaken to understand the COVID-19 nature:

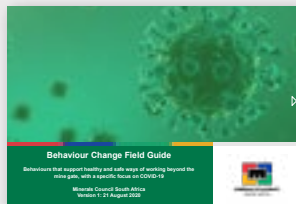
- First, the Aurum Institute was contracted to conduct an analysis of the cases and deaths very early in the pandemic to improve and accelerate learnings.
- Arising from the analysis, a further in-depth study was commissioned on what was thought to be a higher mortality rate in the gold sector. Findings from these analyses suggest that being elderly, having a history of TB or compromised respiratory capacity, or having one or more comorbidities may increase the risk of death. As a result, it was decided that risk mitigation strategies, including vaccinations where possible, should be prioritised for these groups.
- The Minerals Council also commissioned the University of South Africa to conduct a study on the effectiveness of all the control measures in place across the mining industry and whether these were achieving the intended objectives and what improvements were required.
- A COVID-19 seroprevalence survey was undertaken at two mines in different provinces to determine the prevalence of COVID-19 infection among key groups, measured by serology; understand the range of clinical presentation, and risk factors for COVID-19 infection; and to evaluate the effectiveness of infection prevention and control measures. One of the key outcomes of the study to date was that obesity can be a major risk for contracting COVID-19, and wellness programmes to reduce obesity among workers can help reduce this risk.

2

Work was undertaken with mining companies and behaviour change experts focused on sharing and understanding leading practices and lessons to change behaviour among employees and in communities. The aim was for a collective effort on researching healthy and safe behaviours to prevent and control COVID-19; identifying and assessing leading practices across the mining industry; and developing practical field guides to share the findings and improve the industry's efforts. Two field guides were published: the first, *Behaviour Change Field Guide*, is for use on mines, while the *Beyond the Mine Gate Field Guide* looks at empowering employees as agents of change and promoting and supporting healthy and safe behaviours within communities.



Behaviour Change Field Guide
<https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/downloads/send/7-2015/1122-behaviour-change-field-guide>



Beyond The Mine Gate Field Guide
<https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/downloads/send/60-2020/1236-beyond-the-mine-gate-field-guide>

3

The Minerals Council sponsored the development and implementation of a GIS system to inform decisions and mitigate the risks associated with transmission. The system outlines the prevalence of transmissions in communities and provides an overview of the coping mechanisms in place in different areas, such as hospitals and clinics, thus enabling improved decision-making for companies.



COVID-19 community initiatives



Royal Bafokeng Platinum



West Vaal Hospital

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the Minerals Council initiated a range of actions to address the impact of COVID-19 in mining communities. They also received several requests for assistance from various national and provincial government departments (particularly the Departments of Health and Social Development) and from local and district host municipalities.

The Minerals Council and its members have undertaken these community efforts independently, in cooperation with each other, and with government. The initiatives have been both financial and non-financial. They have included: sensitisation and awareness programmes; assistance with community screening and testing campaigns; provision of testing kits for community use; provision of training to healthcare workers at community clinics; company occupational health practitioners' provision of services at community clinics; provision of accommodation for frontline healthcare workers and nursing staff; provision of PPE for healthcare workers; provision of PPE and sanitisers for communities; and provision of food parcels and water and sanitation infrastructure to meet basic social and physical needs of communities in distress during the crisis.

The Minerals Council testing initiative project started in May aimed at increasing capacity in mining and associated community areas. It evolved into a regional cluster approach across the mining provinces of Free State, Gauteng, Kwa Zulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, Northern Cape and Western Cape. This facilitated coordination between mining companies at provincial level. It included providing updates on mine company testing strategies, sharing information on secure testing from labs and the availability of beds in quarantine and isolation facilities, sharing trends and statistics regarding COVID-19 cases and potential hotspot areas using the GIS platform. This enabled member companies to prepare as situations developed.

Mining companies have also made substantial contributions to the national Solidarity Fund, and other funds dedicated to the assistance of small and medium enterprises, community trusts, non-governmental organisations that focus on socio-economic community development, as well as to emergency community relief funds. In addition, the majority of member companies continued to pay salaries and wages of employees who were compelled to stay away from the workplace, for all or most of the first phase of the lock down.

All this assistance was over and above companies' social and labour plan (SLP) commitments.



The 'Oxygen is life' project in the Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape stands out as a mining-affected province without mines. Currently, around 61,000 mine employees (around 15% of members' current workforce) originate from the Eastern Cape. It is a province in dire need. It is the poorest province in the country, it suffers from a lack of infrastructure, and is known to be under-resourced in terms of healthcare facilities, supplies, and personnel.

In late 2020, just prior to South Africa's second wave, the Minerals Council announced that several mining company members - African Rainbow Minerals, Anglo American (representing De Beers, Kumba Iron Ore, Thungela (then Anglo American Coal) and Anglo American Platinum), AngloGold Ashanti, Exxaro, Fraser Alexander, Glencore Alloys, Gold Fields, Harmony, Impala Platinum, Northam Platinum, Royal Bafokeng Platinum, Seriti and Sibanye-Stillwater - together contributed R4.7 million towards oxygen and oxygen-related products for the Eastern Cape.

The project delivered oxygen support equipment: oxygen flow meters, oxygen concentrators, oxygen regulators, nasal cannula, desktop pulse oximeters and fingertip pulse oximeters, non-rebreather masks, and ventilation full-circuit face masks. The latter item was in support of the efforts made by the national ventilator programme, which had already supplied ventilators to the region; an initiative also supported by the Minerals Council via its support of the prototype developed by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). These oxygen support items were distributed to clinics and hospitals in the OR Tambo and Chris Hani Districts.



Coordinated, phased return of foreign mineworkers

Following the national lockdown and the subsequent prohibition of non-South Africans from entering the country, the Minerals Council approached government for a special dispensation to allow the facilitated return of some 45,000 foreign mineworkers to South Africa. In terms of the agreement reached, the Minerals Council took responsibility for coordination, screening, testing, border logistics and transportation of employees to quarantine sites in mining areas

The Minerals Council appointed Teba as an implementing agent.

The Minerals Council was granted a further exemption to allow the facilitated and phased return of foreign mineworkers to their home countries in December for end-of-year leave, and a facilitated, phased return afterwards.

Vaccination programme



There is no doubt that access to an effective vaccine and the significant rollout of a vaccination programme is crucial in the fight against COVID-19; to help re-open the economy in order to save lives and livelihoods.

For the mining industry, the goal is to ensure that mines are ready to ensure that all employees are able to be vaccinated as soon as national policy makes it possible. In line with the national vaccination campaign, mining vaccination sites will follow Department of Health (DoH) regulations in terms of prioritising over-60 employees and then categories of younger employees as permissions for this are given.

At the time of writing, 58 mining occupational health sites had applied to register as primary vaccination site, and a number of others are will operate as secondary sites. The numbers of mining sites beginning vaccinating employees has grown since an Impala Platinum site was selected in late May by the DoH as one of five business pilot sites. The Minerals Council has worked closely with the Business for South Africa and engaged with the DOH in setting protocols and processes for the establishment of workplace vaccination sites.



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Collaboration

Together, the Minerals Council and labour unions - AMCU, NUM, Solidarity and UASA - convened a working group to discuss the prevention of the spread of COVID-19, and to combat its impact on the mining industry, its employees and mining communities. All parties committed to collaborate to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are secured and efficiently rolled out to employees and host communities, where possible, and to address misinformation to ensure voluntary and informed decision-making and participation to enable as many people as possible to take up the opportunity to be vaccinated.



Overcoming vaccine hesitancy

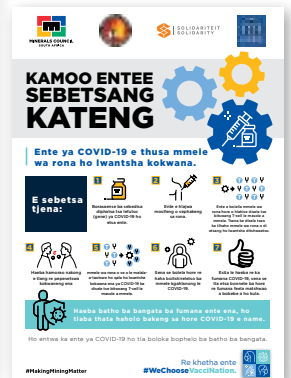
The Minerals Council has convened a working group of members and a task team with unions to develop messaging and tools to understand and deal with vaccine hesitancy, and to provide employees and community members with sound, fact-based information to enable and encourage the acceptance of vaccines.



This material is available at:
<https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/minerals-council-position-on-covid-19>

By June 2021, 21 mining occupational health sites have already received the required permits as primary vaccination sites from the DoH, and four have begun providing vaccinations in line with DoH guidelines.

COVID-19 vaccine posters including translations into different languages:



COVID-19 vaccine videos:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXb6dAxL-zI>



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKtN_ocqW4I



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epnrltojNVY>

COVID-19 poster:



COVID-19 animations:



(English) <https://youtu.be/r9w87WsBwRI>



(Zulu) <https://youtu.be/n9yFAQmIVbg>

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