

Implats closes Marula mine after 14 workers test positive

Implats has temporarily closed its Marula operations in Limpopo after 14 employees tested positive for Covid-19. None of them had started work at the mine yet.



Marula mine

The employees were part of a cluster of 19 positive cases has been detected at and around the mine, all of them asymptomatic, during routine testing protocols. Of the remaining five, one case was identified as a primary contact and the remaining four were identified through contact tracing. Two of the active cases had recently returned from the Eastern Cape. Significantly, 17 of the confirmed cases reside locally, suggesting the prevalence of Covid-19 among local communities is far higher than the company's initial estimates had indicated.

It was also confirmed that these cases included a local health provider and four mine employed health providers working at the mine clinic. This facility was immediately closed for sterilisation and testing of medical staff and all primary contacts.

Every person who tested positive was immediately isolated to prevent the further spread of the virus and has been isolated at the mine's isolation site, at government designated facilities or at home as per government protocols.

Mining minister, Gwede Mantashe said in a video statement that an agreement had been reached to intensify testing, particularly of people coming in from Covid epicentres.

What was important about the infected mineworkers at Marula was that they had not gone underground but were screened, tested and discovered before going underground, and were now quarantined.

“It’s not a nice to-have. It may sound painful, but it protects the workers, it protects the community, and it protects the industry.

“This is what we’re going to do. For example, the Eastern Cape is an epicentre. You will have to quarantine people coming in from the Eastern Cape. If they come from Gauteng, you have to quarantine them. If they’re from the Western Cape, you have an epicentre, and you have to quarantine. Up to yesterday, 157 cases in the Eastern Cape had migrated from the Western Cape, and therefore quarantining for epicentres makes sense,” Mantashe said.

He pointed out that the far-reaching implications had the workers gone underground.

Safety procedures

Marula currently works rotational shift cycles, with two teams alternating a week at work and a week off. Workers due to report for duty next week will not be recalled, to enable it to first complete all relevant health and safety protocols, including: verifying test results, sanitising identified high-risk areas, conducting further contact tracing and testing procedures as required, and placing people in isolation and quarantine based on the outcome of the screening and testing results.

“Implats fully supports the decisive action taken by our government to help mitigate the health, labour market and economic impacts of the coronavirus. We continue to comply with the government and industry standard operating procedures related to Covid-19, as well as our own initiatives to manage this virus. Promoting best practice Covid-19 health guidelines in our workplace, at home and in the community is a priority,” Implats CEO Nico Muller said.

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