

Veterinary involvement critical in Covid-19 response

By [Dr Leon de Bruyn](#)

29 Jan 2021

In a Daily Maverick article by Dr Rebone Moerane dated 17 January 2021, titled "Veterinarians are experienced in dealing with animal pandemics - use our knowledge to fight Covid-19" to be found [here](#), Dr Moerane argues for the use of veterinarians in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The South African Veterinary Association (Sava), on behalf of its members and in conjunction with the Black Veterinary Forum, has offered its support to the National Department of Health in the Covid-19 response through experts to serve on the National Command Council (NCC) or relevant sub-committees.



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A critical part of maintaining food safety and security is managing disease outbreaks, for example, the Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), rinderpest, brucellosis, and avian influenza - managing these disease outbreaks needs a multidisciplinary approach by the public sector and private sector, i.e by veterinarians and industry.

It requires swift responses to ensure that food safety and security is not compromised, animal health and welfare is maintained, and commercial and subsistence farmers' interests are protected.

The Covid-19 virus is a zoonotic disease that should be managed following the One Health principles.

The World Health Organisation indicated in its 2012 report titled [Research Priorities for Zoonoses and Marginalised infections](#) that some 1,400 species of infectious disease pathogens of humans exist and nearly 60% are derived from animal sources. In addition, two-thirds of emerging pathogens are of zoonotic origin. The importance of the One Health principle, through the collaborative efforts of experts in human and animal health, cannot be overstated.

The utilisation of veterinary epidemiologists, virologists and disease control experts, employed by both the private sector and government is vital in South Africa's Covid-19 response. The impact of recent lockdowns appears to have reduced the daily new cases and active cases are declining and vaccinations among health care professionals are expected to

commence shortly. However, monitoring further outbreaks, confirming vaccine efficacy whilst the vaccination programme is rolled out will be critical in achieving consistently low rates of infection even prior to achieving population immunity.

This will undoubtedly stretch the resources available in the human health sphere (whether public or private) that can easily be supplemented by animal health professionals.

Veterinarians, veterinary epidemiologists, virologists and disease control experts, as a critical part of the One Health concept, should therefore play a vital role in containing the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. We will work closely with the chief veterinary officer, Dr Mike Modisane, in this regard.

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