



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION NO 2265

DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 09 JUNE 2023
(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 23)

2265. Mrs M R Mohlala (EFF) to ask the Minister of Water and Sanitation:

In light of the recent alarming reports of cholera contamination in the Vaal River and his department's warning for residents to avoid tap water, what (a) immediate measures will his department take to address the cholera outbreak in the Vaal River and ensure the safety of the affected residents, (b) are the details of how his department will collaborate with relevant stakeholders to effectively contain and treat the outbreak and (c) are the details of the resources that will be allocated to support the efforts?

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MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION

Outbreaks of cholera are caused either by people ingesting sewage-polluted water, or by faecal-oral means - through poor hygiene, eating contaminated food or by coming into contact with the faeces of an infected person. Sewage pollution of rivers can result in cholera bacteria entered the rivers via the faeces of an infected person or people.

DWS released its Green Drop report in 2022, which indicated that the performance of many municipal waste water treatment systems is deteriorating. The report identified 334 wastewater systems in a critical state of performance, in 90 municipalities. This means that many municipalities are discharging effluent from their waste water (sewage) treatment works which does not meet the specified treatment levels, which in turn is resulting in pollution of rivers. The Vaal River is one of the worst polluted rivers in South Africa.

DWS has been carrying out weekly tests for cholera in the Vaal River at the point in Ngwathe where AfriForum tests initially indicated the presence of cholera bacteria, which was as a result of the proximity of a sewage-spilling manhole situated near the watercourse. DWS tests at the

site have not yet identified cholera bacteria. However, this does not mean that the AfriForum tests were incorrect. Cholera-infected faeces can be present at a particular point in the river at a particular time but may later flow downstream. DWS will conduct further tests downstream.

DWS has been informing members of the public that rivers, dams, and streams contain raw (untreated) water, and this water is not suitable for human consumption. Members of the public are therefore urged to avoid consuming untreated water sourced from such water bodies unless it is first disinfected. The National Institute for Communicable Diseases has also set out guidelines that should be followed regarding safe drinking water.

Municipalities are required by law to carry out regular tests of treated drinking water before it is provided to communities. Drinking water provided by municipalities is safe to drink if municipalities are carrying out the tests as required and if the tests show that the water meets the standards for drinking water as set by the South African Bureau of Standards.

Beyond producing the Blue, Green and No Drop monitoring reports, DWS is engaged in several initiatives aimed at addressing the problem of pollution of rivers by municipal waste water treatment works. Firstly, the Minister has agreed on action plans to address infrastructural deficiencies in many of the worst performing municipalities, and DWS is assisting municipalities with funding from the Water Services Infrastructure Grant and Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant to address these deficiencies. Secondly, DWS is taking regulatory action in terms of the National Water Act, including issuing non-compliance notices, directives, taking civil action, and as a last resort, laying criminal charges against polluting municipalities. Thirdly, DWS is drafting amendments to the Water Services Act to strengthen its role as the regulator of municipal water and sanitation services and to enable the Minister to intervene effectively when there is non-compliance with directives to stop pollution.

- (a) Since the announcement of the cholera outbreak in the Free State Province in May 2023, in the Ngwathe Local Municipality (Vredefort and Parys), DWS has been collecting water samples on weekly basis to ensure that communities are receiving drinking water which is compliant to the South African National Standard (SANS) 241 and is safe for human consumption. Water samples were also collected at drinking water sources such as:
- Boreholes and Water Treatment Works (WTW) from the 2 towns (Parys and Vredefort)
 - Raw water at the inlet into both Parys and Vredefort WTW
 - Effluent discharged back into the Vaal River from both the Parys and Vredefort Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTW).
- (b) The DWS has been working with all relevant stakeholders to deal with the cholera outbreak in Free State and is part of the Rapid Response Team (RRT) established to deal with the cholera outbreak in Ngwathe Local Municipality (LM). The team includes the Ngwathe LM, Fezile Dabi District Municipality (DM), and Department of Health. This team meets twice a week and the RRT briefs the Member of Executive Council (MEC) responsible for Health in the Free State on a number of issues including water supply and quality issues every Sunday evening.

To maximise the impact on the ground in terms interventions, a task team has also been established to coordinate the responses specifically on the improvement of water quality. This team is led by the DWS, and includes the Department of Health, Fezile Dabi DM, and Ngwathe LM. Sample collection is carried out as follows:

- The DWS collects samples from all the drinking water sources (boreholes and WTW) in Vredefort and Parys, raw water at the inlet at the Parys and Vredefort WTW, and

Wastewater final effluent discharged back into the Vaal River from both the Parys and Vredefort Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTW).

- The Fezile Dabi DM collects samples in the distribution network for the Vredefort and Parys towns including the water tanks.
- The Ngwathe LM continues with their operational monitoring including parts of the distribution network.

(c) DWS has been providing financial support to the Ngwathe LM with water and Sanitation projects through its grants. There is a project to refurbish the Parys WTW intended to bring relief to the area and ensure that water quality is compliant with norms and standards. For the 2023/24 financial year, the DWS has allocated R50 million under RBIG and R14,021 million under WSIG for water and sanitation interventions in Ngwathe LM.

The DWS also established a War Room with the Ngwathe LM to deal with all the water supply and water quality challenges in the municipality so that immediate interventions can be implemented. The War Room is comprised of the Ngwathe LM, Fezile Dabi DM, the DWS, CoGTA and MISA. The meetings are held twice per week on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

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DRAFT REPLY: RECOMMENDED/ NOT RECOMMENDED/ AMENDED



DR SEAN PHILLIPS
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
DATE: 11 July 2023

DRAFT REPLY: APPROVED/ NOT APPROVED/ AMENDED



MR SENZO MCHUNU, MP
MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION
DATE: 21/7/23