



To: Editors & Health Journalists

Issued by: National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) CEO, Prof Koleka Mlisana

Date: 03 July 2024

UPDATE ON CYBERSECURITY BREACH AFFECTING THE NHLS

JOHANNESBURG, 03 July 2024 - Following the recent compromise of information technology systems and infrastructure, the NHLS has and continues to implement alternative strategies and measures to ensure business continuity.

On the service delivery (testing) side, all laboratories are functioning although providing test results to the clinicians is still a challenge. Under normal circumstances, the laboratory reports are automatically generated and sent to clinicians or made available on WebView, this incident has disabled that functionality. However, all urgent results are communicated telephonically to requesting clinicians.

In addition, the NHLS has distributed a critical test list to all health facilities. This is done to limit the volume of test requests, allowing laboratories to cope with the workload. However, this does not imply that routine tests will not be performed.

We have come up with innovative ways of making TB and HIV viral load historical test results available to clinicians. More tests, prioritising those on the critical test list, will be made available. In addition, we are in the process of developing an electronic registration system for registering new samples and providing test results electronically. Access to laboratory results will be the same as the historical TB and HIV viral test results.

On the systems side, the NHLS' current focus is to bring all its systems back online and the estimated mid-July to initiate end-user access still remains.

The NHLS is handling this challenge with extreme urgency to ensure the timely and secure recovery of all affected operations. The NHLS has opened a case with the South African Police Service. In addition, we have informed all the relevant regulatory bodies about the breach.

The NHLS views this attack in a serious light with significant worry and is treating the situation with great urgency. The breach has endangered the safety and well-being of millions of public health patients. The NHLS Board and Leadership Team sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused by this occurrence and assure the public that the organisation is taking all necessary steps to resolve the situation. Despite the incident, the NHLS remains fully committed to providing high-quality diagnostic services to the public. The NHLS appreciates all stakeholders' patience and the support we continue to receive during this difficult time.

END

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