



MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists

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

Date: Tuesday, 25 June 2024

Security Breach of the NHLS Information Technology systems and infrastructure

The National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) confirms that it has unfortunately, experienced an Information Technology security breach that compromised its systems and infrastructure. The incident occurred on Saturday morning, 22 June 2024.

Preliminary investigation suggests that our Enterprise Resource Planning (Oracle) environment and Laboratory Information System (LIS) (TrakCare) database and our CDW are not affected, therefore no patient data has been lost or compromised. All patient data is safe. The investigation indicated that a ransomware virus was utilised to target selected points in the NHLS IT systems, rendering them inaccessible and blocking communication from the LIS and other databases to and from users.

As such all our systems remain inaccessible both internally and externally including to and from healthcare facilities until the integrity of the environment is secured and repaired. All users will be aware that the NHLS networked laboratory system is heavily reliant on these information technology systems that have been disrupted.

It has established that sections of our system have been deleted including in our backup server and this will require rebuilding the affected parts. Unfortunately, this will take time and investigations thus far have not advanced enough for us to give a timeframe toward the restoration of our systems and full service. All stakeholders and the public will be informed as soon as more information becomes available.

The cyber attacks did continue but we have been able to block these because of the additional layer of security that was built to prevent further damage. We also have had to shutdown systems to enable us to repair the damage.

In response to the breach, the NHLS swiftly activated its Incident Response Team, which included both internal experts and external cybersecurity professionals.



It must be emphasised that the NHLS' responsibility is to ensure business continuity and quality service delivery. Currently all our laboratories are fully functional, receiving and processing clinical samples. Under normal circumstances, the laboratory reports are automatically generated and sent to clinicians or made available on Web View, this incident has disabled that functionality. However, all urgent results are communicated telephonically to requesting clinicians.

The NHLS recognises the importance of its services and the inconvenience that this disruption may have caused, for which we apologise. However, the NHLS board under the leadership of Prof Eric Buch and executive leadership team, led by the CEO, Prof Koleka Mlisana, are working around the clock to address this unfortunate incident and ensure continuity of our services.

END

For more information and media queries, please contact:

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