



There were plenty of televised countdowns for rocket launches in the 1960's which captured the world's imagination, and which showed the countdown as something positive. The previous association with countdown was seen as very negative, almost apocalyptic (think atomic bomb). The space rocket launches showed the countdown as a kind of genesis; the counting down to a new adventure, and a new beginning.

Is this where the world finds itself now? Have we made sufficient progress in our war against Covid-19 that we can sense a new beginning? How are our City and MHA affected right now? Since 1 October we have been in Lockdown Level 1, a far cry from Level 5 which came into effect on 27 March 2020 (that was 571 days ago!!). Our Government defines the various Lockdown level criteria as follows:

- Alert Level 5: a high Covid-19 spread with a low health system readiness
- Alert Level 4: a moderate to high Covid-19 spread with a low to moderate health system readiness
- Alert Level 3: a moderate Covid-19 spread with a moderate health system readiness
- Alert Level 2: a moderate Covid-19 spread with a high health system readiness
- Alert Level 1: a low Covid-19 spread with a high health system readiness

Thanks to discipline and co-operation on the part of our populace, and the widespread administration of vaccines, we now have a low Covid spread and a high health system readiness (vaccination sites, testing, hospitals).

Globally we have learnt from bitter experience, and with huge loss of life (almost 5 million to date), that this Covid war can change direction in a deadly and rapid way, like with a runaway forest fire. Even if we believe that we are in 'countdown' mode towards a new beginning, we have to remain on our guard, to obey laws and regulations, and to keep on playing our part in winning this destructive war. There is still a real possibility of further waves and outbreaks, both locally and globally. Opening up borders for travellers, the Christmas holiday season, summer in South Africa, increasing 'mass gatherings', relaxation of rules and regulations, still vaccination hesitancy, the unpredictable behaviour of the virus; any or all of these could trigger another wave. We **must all** do what we can to prevent this from happening; remember that in protecting ourselves we will be protecting others too.

CovidCom met yesterday to review where we are currently, and what we can or should do to move the MHA family closer to the 'new beginning' mentioned above. We are confident that we are moving in the right direction, while still remaining careful and cautious. We hope that the decisions made, and recorded on page 2, will be greeted with a mixture of relief and joy. More is yet to come!

The Department of Social Development (referred to here as DSD) recently issued a document titled PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR RELAXATION OF MOVEMENTS WITHIN RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES FOR OLDER PERSONS. We have used that document as a template for reviewing the 'relaxations' we have already put in place, and for informing what further changes we should now make. As always, MHA/CovidCom will not knowingly disobey rules and regulations dictated by Government, and we will continue to act in the best interests of residents, staff, and their loved ones.

The following changes affecting residents of CP Bradfield Frail Care, Maranatha Frail Care and Bob Zeiss Bedsitters **will come into effect on Thursday 21 October 2021** (and, for clarity, we record some existing or new rules associated with these changes):

1. Residents will be allowed to leave the premises for shopping/social/personal reasons, limited to two (2) hours per week
2. Residents will be allowed to leave the premises for medical reasons, to visit a bank, or for any other personal business-related reasons (this is the current position)
3. Regarding 1. and 2. above, any such movement out must be by prior arrangement with the Matron, either in person or by phone, between 08h00 and 16h00, Monday to Friday.
4. In addition, MHA is obligated by DSD to maintain a register of any resident leaving the premises, and so residents or accompanying family members are requested to complete the register (its location will be advised to residents)
5. Visitors/family members (a maximum of two per resident, and not under age 18) who wish to enter any of the abovementioned facilities are obligated by DSD to sign the screening form provided, before entering (there have been a few instances of inefficiency regarding access via the CPB/BZB gate, for which we apologize. This has been addressed)
6. Rules regarding visiting a resident in his/her room remain unchanged. Visiting times also remain unchanged (10h30 to 12h00 and 14h30 to 16h00, Monday to Sunday)
7. The DSD Guidelines mentioned above state "The resident's right to decline a visitor should be respected" (eg. an unvaccinated person). Please bear this in mind
8. It is strongly recommended by DSD and by MHA that residents going out should, as far as humanly possible, not be exposed to shopping malls, other indoor public spaces, large gatherings or public transport, but rather be confined to private homes, large outdoor spaces and private transport
9. The DSD Guidelines emphasize that if, during the period away, a resident gets accidentally exposed to anyone where there is a real or perceived risk of infection and the resident gets to be alerted to this, MHA (the Matron or senior person on duty) must be immediately informed, and **before** the resident returns to the facility
10. The MHA bus facility, used for transport to/from shopping centres etc, remains suspended until driver Mike returns from leave in early November
11. Regarding MHA now allowing residents to leave their place of residence (per 1. and 2. above), trust must be the foundation for moving forward

12. If this new relaxation of some rules regarding leaving the facilities results in Covid infections, we will have no choice other than to return to 'locked in' mode immediately, until the threat is managed. If these new steps prove successful (we hope and pray that they will), CovidCom will consider steps to further relax the rules and regulations, as we move to the desperately desired 'new beginning'.

**VID-19: NEWSFLASH #85: FRIDAY 1 OCTOBER 2021
ARE WE IN LIMBO, OR MOVING**



FORWARD?!

One dictionary provides some interesting definitions of the phrase 'being in limbo'. The definitions are:

a place or state of oblivion to which persons or things are

regarded as being relegated when cast aside, forgotten, past, or out of date an intermediate, transitional, or midway state or place

a place or state of imprisonment or confinement or, to get really serious, a region on the border of hell or heaven,

serving as the abode after death of unbaptized infants and of the righteous who died before the coming of Christ.

Following the President's announcement last night that we are into Lockdown Level 1 as of today, we could easily just shrug our shoulders and mutter 'same old, same old' or, somewhat cynically, anticipate that CovidCom might dish up some scraps to gradually get us to the 'new normal' destination. This is not the truth!

CovidCom met this morning, which we were planning to do irrespective of when the next announcement by the President was going to be made, or its outcome. Infection levels in our City and across the country continue to decline, and MHA needs to keep doing what we have been doing since March last year, namely reviewing our battle plans, strategies and tactics, to keep us ahead of the deadly pandemic. CovidCom firmly believes that we are not in limbo, but that we are moving forward, while keeping a balanced approach. Change is inevitable, but timing is critical.

Our Villages have largely returned to the 'new normal' way of life, but our two Frail Care units and our Bedsitter unit have been occupying the minds of CovidCom's members on a daily (and nightly!) basis. So many of the words contained in the definition of 'limbo', quoted above, could be applied to the current situation facing residents in our Frail Cares and Bedsitters, but the reality is, in the context of the MHA family, they are the ones most at risk of contracting, and dying from, the virus. After a lot of vigorous debate, some bold decisions were made in this morning's CovidCom meeting, and these are laid out on page 2 of this Newsflash.

The changes come with words of caution: we all need to remain vigilant, careful and cautious, always watching out for one another. COVID-19 is still active across the world. People are still dying from it; just yesterday alone over 8600 people worldwide died from Covid (to put that into perspective, over the past 15 years only 7400 people in total died in commercial airline accidents). Please be careful.

The following are the changes agreed by CovidCom at the 1 October 2021 meeting:

CP BRADFIELD FRAIL CARE, MARANATHA FRAIL CARE, BOB ZEISS BEDSITTERS:

- moving to Lockdown Level 1 presents us with an opportunity to make changes. However, these changes will have to be altered if South Africa's infection levels increase, or if Covid enters any of our facilities, or if the MHA rule relaxations are abused
- visitors into these three facilities will be allowed, as from tomorrow (Saturday 2 October 2021), on the following basis:
- a maximum of two visitors at a time per resident will be allowed to visit
 - no children under the age of 18 will be allowed
 - no appointments need to be made
 - each visitor will be required to sign a register upon arrival at the CPB/BZB entrance gate, and have his/her temperature recorded
 - any person who is presenting any cold-like or flu-like symptoms should not visit a resident
 - visits can take place between 10h30 and 12h00, and between 14h30 and 16h00 daily, Monday to Sunday
 - visitors and residents are earnestly requested to abide by the above, and to co-operate, in particular adherence to visiting hours. In order to manage the arrangements, our Matrons will not be able to accommodate any flexibility
- residents will still not be allowed to leave the facilities other than to attend an appointment made (eg. doctor/dentist etc), in which event isolation is not required on return
- these new arrangements will be put to the test during the next two weeks, and will be reviewed by CovidCom at its next meeting on Friday 15 October 2021

OUR VILLAGES:

No further changes need to be made, following last night's announcement regarding Level 1. However, the following clarification is provided:

- some confusing reference was made in a couple of end-September Village newsletter about the halls still not being available for teas etc, for example after a croquet match. This is incorrect. The halls are again open for any pre-Covid function, other than residents and visitors need to adhere to Government's rules applicable to Level 1, which include not exceeding 50% of a venue's capacity, wearing a mask when practical to do so, and maintaining a safe distance
- some residents have queried the rules around wearing of masks. Government's rules (with which we must always comply) are clear on the matter: you have to wear a mask over your nose and mouth when you are in a public space (basically this means any space where you encounter another person). The best 'rule of thumb' for this is to regard any place other than your own cottage as a public space; in effect, when you leave your cottage, wear your mask!
- There are still some Village folk who remain unsure about what is allowed/not allowed regarding gathering or visiting within your Village. You re free to visit your neighbour's cottage, have a large or small social gathering like a braai, meet in the hall, go to the library, and generally to do what you did pre-Covid. You just have to obey safety/health rules and regulations; see above

Look after yourselves and look out for your neighbour.

Malcolm Stewart

CovidCom Chairman (and on behalf of the Board, Management, our staff, and CovidCom)