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The owner of the Tin Roof bar in Claremont is adamant his venue was not the source of a recent superspreader event which resulted in 89 new cases, 37 of which were matric pupils. Picture: Brendan Magaar/African News Agency (ANA)

Tin Roof owner adamant venue not source of Covid-19 'superspreader event'

By Sam Spiller  Oct 18, 2020



Cape Town - A large number of Covid-19 cases among high school pupils tracked to a bar in Cape Town has raised questions about social gatherings and easing of lockdown.

James Truter, owner of the Tin Roof bar in Claremont, was adamant his venue was not the source of a recent superspreader event which resulted in 89 new cases, 37 of which were matric pupils.

"We're only trading at half-capacity, so the venue isn't as packed as it used to be," Truter said.

"Now, we have half the crowd and it's a far more sedate environment. People are sitting on benches and watching sport, they're drinking beer and playing pool, it's not the same kind of business."

To fall in line with current restrictions, Truter converted the venue, which used to be a nightclub, into a bar while also adhering to health and safety guidelines such as enforcing physical distancing and a visitor attendance log.

Truter said the venue had faced the problem of crowds waiting outside to enter, and that they had taken it upon themselves to solve it, enforcing physical distancing and encouraging waiting patrons to leave.

Shaun Simpson, headmaster of Rondebosch Boys High School, confirmed the school had recorded 10 infections among its pupils, five of which were in Grade 12, that were directly linked to three individuals who had attended the event at the Tin Roof.

"Subsequent infections in this group are the ripple effect of them being closely socially interactive," Simpson said. "In other words, several are friends, or brothers of friends, who form a close-knit group and visit and interact with each other socially."

Simpson added that both parents and teenagers had become less vigilant now that they could travel and socialise.

"The other problem we have experienced is that many teenagers, although not all, tend to be asymptomatic and do not know, therefore, that they are spreaders until they test positive."

Since the Tin Roof incident, the school had taken additional steps to prevent further outbreaks such as cancelling all social or close-interaction events and only allowing matrics back to the school for them to write their final exams.

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The incident also prompted other schools to remind parents of the threat of Covid-19.

“We have sent out letters regularly reminding parents, and obviously, post-this we have sent out another letter reminding everyone we need to take this (virus) seriously,” said Sheena Crawford-Kempster, managing director of Reddam House SA.

Western Cape Premier Alan Winde has called for an investigation into the bar with the police and Western Cape Liquor Authority.

Truter said he had received no contact from the provincial government’s coronavirus response team prior to their announcement of the event and had learnt of his venue’s involvement via the media.

“I haven’t had a word from them, I eventually sent a letter to Alan Winde’s office but I received no response to that,” he explained.

“I then phoned there on Thursday and his PA was quite surprised to hear that and she got hold of someone at the medical department who then phoned me that afternoon.”

Bianca Capazorio, spokesperson for Winde, said the information the government conveyed was presented as a case study of what could happen when social behaviour lapsed and there could be a second wave of the pandemic.

“This communication is a vital part of our response strategy, because responsible individual and collective behaviour is our best defence against Covid-19,” said Capazorio.

She said no other possible superspreader events were being monitored in the province, though there had been several small clusters identified at events where physical distancing had not been adhered to, one of which was a funeral.

“The Department of Health has been following up on the contacts of the people in our system who have tested positive for Covid-19.”

Wendy Alberts, chief executive the Restaurants Association of SA, and who has been in contact with the Tin Roof, said it was being targeted without factual content and the government was not taking private gatherings into account.

Professor Burtram Fielding, director of research and development at the University of Western Cape, said ventilation was one of the primary factors to consider when people gathered socially.

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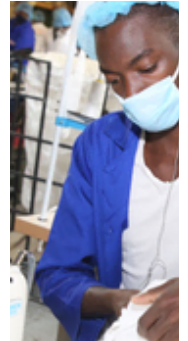
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