

# Smile Foundation calls for support amid backlog of child surgeries

The Smile Foundation is calling on the South African public for urgent support in providing care to patients and their families, as well as in addressing the growing backlog of children in need of surgery as soon as it is deemed safe.



Two-year-old Rhiaadra, diagnosed with Aperts Syndrome, a genetic disorder which involves the skull, the face and both hands and feet, was scheduled to have surgery on 2 June. Given lockdown and the steep rise in Covid cases countrywide, the surgery has been provisionally rescheduled for September 2020.

All elective surgeries have been postponed across not only South Africa, but globally, to ensure patient safety and enable hospitals to effectively respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Only urgent oncology and trauma cases have received surgery during lockdown, resulting in a significant backlog of elective surgeries, including plastic and reconstructive surgery for children in desperate need.

Hedley Lewis, CEO of Smile Foundation, says a number of children supported by Smile Foundation are awaiting surgery at various hospitals across the country.

## Life-changing surgery

“The reconstructive surgery required to assist these children not only puts hundreds of children needing life-changing surgery at a disadvantage, but the costs will run into hundreds of thousands of rands to try catch up to pre-Covid levels of service. Unfortunately, this situation is completely beyond everyone’s control, and as South Africa hits its peak of the Covid-19 virus, it is unclear when elective surgeries will be allowed.”

To help alleviate the backlogs and in order for the Smile Foundation to continue providing urgent assistance to the children and their families, the organisation is calling on members of the public to take part in a raffle draw at a cost of R100 per ticket. Participants stand the chance of winning a R100,000 cash prize.

“With your help, the Smile Foundation will be able to offer these children an opportunity to live a better life. While delaying the surgeries is absolutely necessary for the safety of all patients, it means that these already vulnerable children will face increased challenges. We’re calling on members of the South African public to help us to continue to provide critical support to these children and their families during these unprecedented times while they wait for their much-needed surgeries.”

## Long-term effects on the patients

Lewis says the postponement of these surgeries has had a significant psychological impact on the patients as well as their families, and in a number of cases, could have long-term effects on the patients.

“A long-term successful outcome for a cleft lip or palate means a baby needs to be operated on within the first 12 months, especially for speech development. Delaying the surgeries could result in long-term permanent issues, including never learning to speak correctly.”



He says among the urgent cases, the organisation has been advised that a number of the patients have not arrived for scheduled surgeries because they are too afraid of contracting Covid-19.

One of the surgeons who works extensively with the Smile Foundation says, “We anticipate that there will be a Covid generation of patients who may not have received their surgeries timeously or needed revision and could not because of the situations that are completely out of the control of anyone.”

The raffle draw date is on World Smile Day, Friday, 2 October. Click [here](#) to enter or go to [www.smilefoundation.co.za](http://www.smilefoundation.co.za).

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