

REMARKS BY HEALTH MINISTER DR JOE PHAALA DURING COVID-19 MEDIA BRIEFING – FRIDAY, 27 AUGUST 2021

Good morning to participants, viewers and fellow panellists.

Greetings to my colleague Deputy Minister DR Dhlomo,

We thank the media platforms for this opportunity to brief South Africans on progress and challenges in our battle against COVID-19. I thank all the panellists of this morning, special thanks to Ms Lerato Moletsane for agreeing to come and share her personal experience in the battle against COVID-19.

The third wave is continuing to behave in an unpredictable manner, different from the first and second waves. The case trajectory had showed an initial steep downward trend since 9th July, however since 13 August cases started to trend upwards. This fluctuation can also be seen in individual provinces such as the W Cape, N Cape, and the F State especially. The encouraging thing is that Gauteng which was the first and significant epicentre has sustained a continuous downward trend.

Over the last seven days there has been a 2,2% decrease in new cases which is a very slow reduction. The last three days of the midweek tests have given daily positives of between 10 000 and 13 000/ day which is still very high, with average positive rate of 19-20%, very far from the WHO recommended stability of 5%.

Active cases over the last seven days increased by 1% to 169 000.

Admission to hospitals reduced by 0,7% to 13 600 yesterday, small but welcome.

Over the last seven days hospitalization reduced by 3,3%.

New cases reduced by 2,2% again small but welcome, even though there were increases in E Cape, KZN, N Cape and F State over the last seven days.

By yesterday a total of 80 826 people had passed away from confirmed COVID-19 with 357 new deaths.

Even though we sad average positivity rate is 19%, the W Cape and N Cape remain with much higher positive rate at 27% and 30% respectively. The N Cape has remained high over a prolonged period.

A very worrying trend is that in both provinces there has been younger people between ages 10-19 years testing positive. While some clusters can be traced to school opening there are also indications of social activities such as partying without precautions.

What this means is that the third wave is dragging longer and in the absence of new variants it can only mean that more people are not taking precautions. The risk is that by the time we hit the fourth wave driven by a new variant we could be found still in medium trend of the third wave, which will mean very little break for our health workers.

On the vaccines side, the situation looks very promising from all three factors which will determine success ie Supply stability, sustained capacity to deliver the service and good uptake by the public.

As we know, seven days ago we opened up for registration and vaccination of everybody over 18 years meaning the 18-34 had new opportunity. The response of our young people who are the future of our country has been overwhelming.

On the first day on 20 August we registered more than 560 000 and vaccinated more than 81 000. Even the weekend numbers went much higher. Since Monday 23 August our overall daily vaccinations have been above 240 000 even reaching above 260 000, with 268 000 on Wednesday and 265 000 yesterday on Thursday.

For the 18-34 we vaccinated 81 173 on 20 August, 93 000 on 23rd, 99000 on 24th, 98000 on 25th and 89000 on 26th. The provincial share of this cohort thus far is :

GP= 158000, WC= 106000, KZN = 83000, LP= 42000, EC= 37000, MP= 35000, FS= 22000, NW= 23000 and NCape= 8000.

As of last night the total number of vaccines administered has reached 11,648m, an increase of just a little under 1,5m more doses in the last seven days, a new record.

The total number of individuals with at least one jab of either Pfizer or J&J is now 8,841m people which is 1 million more than this time last week.

The total number of people fully vaccinated either with one dose of J&J or two doses of Pfizer is now 5,450million which is 850000 more than last week.

The male to female ratio is being narrowed possibly by the young people now at 58,5 females to 41,5 males. The last seven days have showed that we do have the capacity to administer up to 300 000 vaccines as a target set for us by President if people come forward.

We are happy that many people are ignoring the fake news which are being peddled unfortunately even by some few health professionals. We urge the young people to encourage their parents and older relatives to come forward.

A suggestion has been made by various influential people in society that we should consider mandatory vaccination policy. We are discussing this at various forums and considering options. We have noted discussions taking place about a possible J&J booster. This matter has been referred to our Vaccines MAC to look at. Our priority is to make sure that all adult South Africans who are willing get vaccinated first only then can we consider other suggestions.

We are grateful to the government of the USA for donating through the Covax facility another 2,2m doses of the Pfizer vaccines which is arriving on Saturday 28 August adding to the 5,6m we received in July. This donation will reinforce our stock levels.

We again wish to thank our health workers for continuing to save lives. Let us relieve their pressure by vaccinating.

The COVID-19 fight can be won, let us all play our part.

Remember all the safety protocols.

I thank you.