

Remarks by Dr M J Phaahla , Minister of Health during COVID-19
Vaccination roll-out programme Media Briefing, on 15 October 2021.

Thanks Mr Foster Mohale, our facilitator

Good morning to Deputy Minister Dr Dhlomo,

Acting DG Dr Crisp and other officials

Members of the media, Viewers and Listeners at home

Good morning to all South Africans

We are pleased to come back to you again this morning to keep you abreast with progress with the fight against the pandemic. Today we are conducting this media briefing from the diamond city of Kimberley in the Northern Cape, where later on today I will join the Premier of the province Dr Zamani Saul and Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture Minister Mthethwa on the “***Return To Play***” national program which I will say a little more about later on. Due to these activities we have shortened our briefing today.

We are pleased to report that the number of new infections have continued on a downward trend over the last seven days at 28% reduction and a 3,5% reduction in hospitalization but we still have just over 5000 people in hospital with COVID-19.

The positivity rate has been a seven day average of 2,7% which is the right direction. We emphasize seven days averages because it's more reliable than looking at the daily fluctuations. Reported deaths are also down by 16%, which is good although we would prefer zero

death. It will take a little longer to see even much lower numbers of people still in hospital as there are fewer admissions going forward.

The vaccination programme remains stable having kept the momentum of the previous week after the Vooma Weekend. The total doses administered per day have remained around 2000 with some days just below that as was the case on Wednesday but above that yesterday at 215 438.

Total doses administered by yesterday just shy of 20 million at 19,899 million so by end of today we will cross the 20 million mark. Individuals with at least one jab have reached 13,803 million which is 34,6% of all adults so we getting closer to 35% which will be half of the 70% we are targeting.

The performance provinces differ quite a bit wit the Western Cape having crossed the 40% mark at 43%, and the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Free State close by at 39+ %, all three should cross 40% by Monday next week. Gauteng is pulling fairly well with over 3,5 million jabbed but due to large population population, that constitutes only 31,7% of the adult population On the bottom half we are concerned by the pace of Mpumalanga and KZN especially the latter wit a big population. We will continue to give them support.

We are also pleased with the enthusiasm with which South Africans have embraced the Vaccination certificate. As 15h30 yesterday the 14th October more than 1,5 million certificates had been downloaded. We have also resent more than 10 million SMS-es with vaccination codes in case they were not saved after vaccination.

We acknowledge that many of you were frustrated when the system was not responsive. This was largely due to big numbers at peak demand times when the server could not cope. The certificate development team at CSIR is monitoring the traffic and making appropriate adjustments.

Our top most priority is to protect your personal information. We apologize for the inconvenience to those who had to try many times especially those who had the pressure to use the certificate urgently. We are certain that the service will only get better as we improve daily.

As we said last week, this is just the first phase and by end of October there will be more improvements in terms of access and security. Please continue to save your vaccination codes as you get the sms after vaccination. In case of trouble, you can call the hotline at 0800 029 999 or email Evdsquiries@health.gov.za.

We welcome the partnership with the Ministry of Sport, Arts and Culture in promoting safe “ Return to Play”. We are happy that one of the leading sporting codes with mass following, football has led the way with the 2000 spectators at FNB stadium on Tuesday evening who were all having their vaccination certificates as a condition for obtaining a ticket.

We know that rugby is already preparing to follow and we thank Minister Mthethwa and Deputy President David Mabuza for being the champions of this campaign. I am confident that once we can be assured that the protocols are being well established we can ramp up the numbers in a safe environment . We encourage all Sport, Arts

, Culture, Music, Exhibitions and Conferencing to follow suite, vaccinate and open up is the message.

Today I am happy to announce that we have reached a stage where we are ready to open up vaccination for children between 12- 17 years of age, and majority of this cohort are in the secondary or high school level.

This follows a recommendation by the Vaccine Ministerial Advisory Committee which was supported by Health MECs and Cabinet. This service will start on Wednesday, 20 October 2021 to allow the necessary preparation on the EVDS and other logistics.

We believe this will come handy as schools start exams or are advanced towards concluding the academic year and prepare for the next year. The Pfizer vaccine has been approved by SAHPRA for this age group and will be used for this purpose.

The VMAC advised that for now, we only give one dose while assessing information which suggests that in a few cases there has been short-lived cases of transient myocarditis after two doses. The timing of the second dose will be informed by further information on this rarely observed side effect which has no permanent risk.

The VMAC has also advised that additional doses be given to individuals with compromised immunity such as those on long term oral steroids therapy for autoimmune conditions, those with haematological or immune malignancies, those with solid organ or bone marrow transplant, renal dialysis and primary immunological disorders.

The advise is that these categories of patients be offered additional dose over the prescribed normal, but this must be strictly under the referral by their medical doctor under their supervision .

The other matter we are addressing is that of the call by some health workers on the front line that they should be considered for booster doses due to the high risk of their work and the fact that they were vaccinated first almost 8 months ago starting on 17 February 2021 on the Sisonke study.

The request is receiving attention and we are working with the SA Medical Research Council on a possible approach and the MRC has applied to SAHPRA to consider a J&J booster to follow the Sisonke study in order to use this as a second study on the possible benefit of enhanced immunity with a booster of the otherwise one dose vaccine. We will wait the results of this application.

Lastly there is the issue of people who have come from other countries having received vaccines which are not used now in RSA. These are either foreign nationals who reside in South Africa and had gone home and received a vaccine such as AstraZeneca, Moderna , Sputnik, Sinovac etc not yet in use in RSA.

We are not able to provide second doses where they are required and neither can we give them a vaccine certificate when they need one.

The advice we have received is that such individuals can be offered one dose of Pfizer to complete their two doses as there is evidence

that AstraZeneca and Moderna combine well with Pfizer and it's believed that it's safe with the others as well.

We are again calling on all South Africans to come forward and contribute towards their own health safety and that of your families, friends, co-workers by vaccinating.

By so doing we can reclaim our lives as experienced by the 2000 fans at the Bafana- Bafana vs Ethiopia game of which I was honoured to be part.

I thank you