

REMARKS BY DR M J PHAAHLA, MINISTER OF HEALTH DURING COVID-19 VACCINATION ROLL-OUT PROGRAMME MEDIA BRIEFING, ON 29 OCTOBER 2021

Thanks MR Foster Mohale our facilitator
Good morning, Deputy Minister Dhlomo,
And the Deputy Chairperson of IEC Ms Janet Love
Acting DG DR Crisp
Our special guest Ms Rosheda Muller, President of South African Informal Traders Alliance,
Media
Viewers and listeners at home
Good morning to all South Africans

We are grateful and privileged again this morning to have another opportunity to share with South Africans progress and challenges in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic.

We welcome our two guests I mentioned earlier on. As we all know we will go to the polls in three days' time to elect our local government leaders and we are grateful that the IEC is part of this media briefing. I will come back to the risks and opportunities posed by these elections.

I will start by giving a short update on the epidemiological situation. The rate of infections over the last 14 days has remained stable at a low base. By yesterday the total active cases were 18 568 compared to 46 577 a month ago on 29th September 2021.

Total admissions in hospital yesterday was 3 939 compared to 6 173 same day last month, new cases have reduced by 22% over the last seven days. Hospitalization has reduced by 14.5% over the last seven days and death rate reduced by 18%. Overall positivity rate is at 1,7% over last seven days with all provinces reflecting low positivity rates.

The overall picture is that of a stable infection rate far below a thousand per day with ever reducing burden on our health facilities. Again I want to caution that we are not yet out of the woods and any serious lowering of our guard can be catastrophic.

We are learning from experience in other countries such as example in Russia they are going back to lockdown after serious outbreaks and we hope we do not go that route. We therefore want to caution those who

are already calling for the end of the state of disaster completely which is the only means at the disposal of the government to help us keep in check our risky behaviours negating safety measures.

In as far as the risk posed by the election campaign it is still too early to tell. As the numbers show we have not yet experienced any spikes which can be linked to the election campaigns but this is not yet a point of comfort.

We know that even when there has been a super spreader event the effects will be felt 7-15 days later. We are also aware that the next three days over this weekend are going to be the most risky as political parties rally their supporters at big gatherings to motivate them to go out in big numbers on Monday.

Notwithstanding the fact that most gatherings are held outdoor the risk is still high when large crowds gather with no social distancing, no masks and go on to sing and shout.

We therefore appeal to all political parties to approach their final push gatherings with caution. You all know what saves lives, limit your numbers to 2000 or less, keep distances, wear masks, and avoid clustering before and after the gatherings. We will only know after 15th November whether we have gone through the elections unscathed or not.

We know that our biggest weapon against COVID-19 at this stage is vaccination and we have to use every opportunity where people will be gathered to offer vaccination. We are therefore very pleased with the partnership we have struck with the IEC in this regard.

We are pleased to announce that we have agreed to set up “pop up” vaccination sites in the vicinity of at least 1000 voting stations throughout the country, targeting mainly areas where the uptake of vaccination has been low. The sites will be set up in the voting precinct but outside the area demarcated strictly for voting so that they don’t interfere with the main purpose of the day which is voting.

We hope that this arrangement will offer convenience in that people will have travelled from their homes and they’ll can achieve both their vote and vaccination in one trip. We welcome the fact that political parties have no problem with this arrangement.

Once a person has voted they can then proceed to the pop-up site to be registered and vaccinated. To make it even more convenient to have one trip, priority will be given to the use of the J& J vaccine which is a one dose, but Pfizer will be available if an individual prefers it or they are due for second dose.

We thank our health workers who raised their hand to be on duty on this day and thank the IEC authorities for their support and cooperation.

We are happy to announce that Nandos Chicken has donated R500 000 as an incentive for health care workers for a small competition on Election Day.

Nandos is offering 1000 vouchers valued at R500 each which will be awarded to members of 15 best performing teams in each province which means 135 teams spread equally in all 9 provinces will benefit with each team member receiving the R500 voucher. We appreciate this gesture and hope other businesses will come forward to offer more products in appreciation of our hard-working health workers.

In addition, Uber has also offered free rides up to R100 each for health workers who will be on duty on Election Day. We appreciate every form of incentive which encourages people to vaccinate. The list of pop-up vaccination sites will be available on the SA-coronavirus website and NDOH website.

Still on the incentive side I am happy to announce a pilot scheme valued at R26m designed to benefit 260 000 people over the age of 60 who will receive their first vaccination during the month of November 2021.

Those who fall within this group will qualify for a R100 grocery voucher called the Vooma Voucher which can be redeemed at Shoprite, Checkers and U-Save stores. This will be on a first come-first vaccination-first serve basis. The voucher will be sent via SMS to the cell number provided at registration.

This scheme is sponsored by amongst others the DG Murray Trust, Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropy, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Elma Vaccine and Immunization Foundation and Michael and Susan Dell Foundation. We hope the pilot will be a success so that it can encourage other companies to come forward. We welcome other initiatives which are still being considered.

The vaccination program has retained a steady momentum and as of yesterday at 6pm we reached another milestone of 22 118 947 doses administered with 15 078 053 individuals with at least one jab which is 37,9% of the adult population with 12 140 701 fully vaccinated which is 30% of the adult population. We are confident that by middle of November we will reach 40% of adults which takes us a step closer to 70% of adults.

We are especially optimistic about reaching 70% of the above 60 years and close to 70% of the 50- 59 years before end of December 2021. We again urge everyone to take advantage of the current low levels of infection before the fourth wave hits.

The vaccination of 12-17 year olds is proceeding steadily with 99 900 done by yesterday and 183 700 registered. We expect the numbers to pick up during the school holidays.

On the vaccination certificate side by yesterday just over 2,8m had been downloaded. The security of the certificate will be enhanced during November month.

Lastly I wish to again urge all South Africans to heed the call to protect themselves, their families, friends, neighbours and co-workers now by taking the vaccine, the nation's future is in your hands. Let us keep safe in the last three days of the election campaign and let's vaccinate before, on Election Day and after it.

I thank you.