

**SPEECH BY MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR JOE PHAAHLA AT  
THE LAUNCH OF GLOBAL VAX CAMPAIGN AT KWA-  
CALUZA SPORTSFIELD, UMGUNGUDLOVU DISTRICT,  
KWAZULU-NATAL**

**THURSDAY, 03 JUNE 2022**

Programme Director,  
Deputy Minister, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo,  
MEC for Health, Ms Nomagugu Simelane,  
Mayor of the District Municipality, Councillor Mzi Zuma  
US Embassy Charge d' Affairs, Ms Heather Merritt,  
Director-General, Dr Sandile Buthelezi,  
HOD, Dr Sandile Tshabalala,  
Other Representatives of the US Development Agencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Senior Health Officials,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure to pay visit to the District of uMgungundlovu and coming here to spread our word and intensify our voice for vaccination.

The campaign for more and more of us receiving the life-saving jab continues unabated precisely because the vaccine remains the only defence we have against the Covid-19 infection.

Notwithstanding the vicious spread of the anti-vaccine message, the scientific conclusion existing today still confirms the efficacy and safety of the vaccine. Out of the more than 20 million South Africans that we have vaccinated since May 17, 2021, to April 30, 2022, SAHPRA has received at least 5 900 Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) reports, which are being assessed by the relevant bodies to confirm as to whether these are as a result of the vaccine. If indeed, they are the Covid-19 Vaccine Injury No Fault Compensation scheme we have established would kick-in to assist those impacted.

The lifting of the state of disaster management doesn't mean the pandemic is over, and the less severity and transmissibility of the current COVID-19 variant of Omicron doesn't mean we are now safe from the virus.

Despite the current low vaccine uptake as a result of many factors, we are happy with the progress made so far because we have administered over **36 million doses**, and more than **22 million**

**people** including children have vaccinated. We are pleased to report that **70% of people** over the age of 60 years have received at least one dose, and **65% of adults** have vaccinated too.

We would like to thank the parents of more than **1, 8 million children** who vaccinated, and this shows that they care about the health of their children, our future leaders. We say to other parents that, let`s use the upcoming school holidays later this month to support and accompany our children to vaccination sites. Our biggest challenge is to convince the youth between the age of 18 to 34 years who are not coming in numbers, majority of them are in universities and colleges. Only **6,6 million** of them have vaccinated

To this far, more than 50% of adults in South Africa have had at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, that`s 1 in 2 adults are now vaccinated. This is an incredible achievement, and we thank you South Africans for heading the call to vaccinate. And we also thank all the health workers and everyone who helped to make this possible in order to the country to achieve population immunity.

The greater achievement is that more than **70% of people** aged 60 years and above have been vaccinated. Right from the beginning of the pandemic we knew COVID-19 affected the elderly the most with the greatest number of deaths sadly amongst people over 80 years.

This is why we started by vaccinating the most vulnerable front-line workers and the elderly first. We wanted to protect you and to save as many lives as possible. The age group of 50 years and above is not far behind with 65% of this group having already vaccinated.

We applaud the elderly for coming forward in large numbers and we encourage you, if you have not had your second dose or booster dose to come get it now. Vaccinations save lives and booster shots help to keep your immunity up.

It is my pleasure to announce that all people over the age 50 years can now receive an additional or second booster shot of the Pfizer vaccine with effect from Monday, 7 June 2022, and we encourage you to come forward in numbers, especially if you live with co-morbidities like diabetes, cancer, HIV, TB or hypertension.

However, in order to qualify for the additional dose, you should have received your last dose, Pfizer or J&J, at least four months after third Pfizer dose.

Although the number of Covid related hospitalisations are very low as compared to the last year this time, but we are worried that majority of patients admitted in our hospitals due to Covid-19, are those who are not vaccinated. This simply suggests that unvaccinated people remain vulnerable and if we were to be hit by another variant of concern or wave, unvaccinated people will flood our health facilities.

You might not think you are not at risk of severe Covid but every day we admit people, especially youth to hospital who are very sick due to Covid and the majority of those admitted have not vaccinated. It is clear that vaccines do protect you, no matter how old or young you are.

Our concern remains the youth category, with a low vaccine uptake amongst them, especially the 35 - 49 age group, who depicts huge sense of hesitancy largely influenced by the negativity and vaccine misinformation messages spread mainly through social media platforms.

However, we are jointly with private sector and civil society working hard to gradually increase the numbers of the vaccinated amongst our people, using varied demand creation strategies like the Youth led “**KeReady campaign**” conceptualized and led by young medical doctors, who give clear explanation on the effects and protective capacity of the vaccine to dispel the myths.

Our visit today here, at Kwa-Caluza is part of the bigger efforts to increase the uptake. We are here today to launch the Global Vax campaign in partnership with the US government to accelerate Global COVID-19 vaccinations.

This initiative is aimed at contributing to the global goal to vaccinate 70 percent of the global population against Covid-19 in 2022. This approach builds on the extraordinary commitment the US President Joe Biden has made to donate more than 1.2 million vaccine doses by the end of 2022 and intensifies our efforts to get shots in arms.

The Global Vax is an addition in the efforts of our bilateral in health with the US government, which encompass a wide range of programs such as HIV, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted infections and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – respiratory, mental health, genomic research, global health security, capacity building,

disease surveillance, laboratory enhancements, antimicrobial resistance, research and food security amongst others.

It would add into our work to enhance partnership in health pandemic response and health system strengthening between the two countries.

And we appreciate the support that the US government has offered to the South African government and people in the fight against many diseases and transforming the health system. It is in agreement with our focus this year as agreed with Provincial MECs to recover our comprehensive health services and integrate the COVID-19 mitigation measures into the comprehensive basket of services we offer at Primary Health Care levels.

Global Vax will be implemented through a mechanism called ADAPT, meaning (Adapt Accelerating Development Against Pandemic Threats Activity) managed by Right to Care in support of the national and provincial departments of health.

We are upscaling demand for vaccine in the targeted districts, sub-districts and wards with low vaccination uptake using local and above the line communications platforms. Increase awareness of the facts about Covid-19 vaccination amongst the vulnerable

people, undocumented people and young people, through collaboration with partners to reduce vaccine hesitancy.

One of the key segments of the campaign through the NGO – Right to Care, and we are launching is the App FindMyJab.co.za, which will make it easier of anyone to find the closest vaccine site. We believe this will work to the desires of the youth who spend much of their time online dissecting information sites. **FindMyJab** can accessed from any device and is easy to use, once you enter your location, you will see a list of closest sites.

We are responding to what the University of Cape Town's COVID-19 Vaccine survey says, that 50% of the unvaccinated people are either willing to be vaccinated but are waiting to see results of the vaccination roll-out. They say they either don't know where to go to get vaccinated or that sites are too far away from them.

Through this campaign, we are running community-driven campaigns to address concerns about vaccinating, mobile vaccination teams are being deployed to take vaccines to underserved areas, especially in rural districts, while collaboration with communities is helping people to find vaccine sites and get the jab.

We again appeal to our people that go out in your numbers and receive the vaccine. We will defeat the Covid-19 pandemic and increase opportunities to return to normal life with no regulations. In conclusion, as you are aware that since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, the healthcare workers in South Africa and around the world have not only battled this deadly disease, but also their own mental-health issues brought on by their daily experience of this pandemic. Others have lost family members, colleagues, patients and so forth due to the pandemic.

Thus, this has placed fears, fatigue, burnout, depression and anxiety even more in the spotlight. Thus, our young Doctors and health stakeholders have requested us to join and support a special campaign which aims to raise awareness about mental health struggles our healthcare workers go through and remind everyone that they are also human.

This campaign is called **#CrazySock4Docs** and include all healthcare workers, and we support it by simply wearing different and colourful socks, hence you can see me and other guests today, in case you have not noticed. This cost-effective sign of support means a lot to our hardworking and selfless healthcare workers.

I thank you