



government communications

Department:  
Government Communication and Information System  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## VACCINES Q&A

### **Vaccine safety is a priority**

Our rollout strategy includes testing each vaccine. We thank the efforts of our scientists in working with government to ensure the safety of all vaccines.

### **Which vaccines are effective against the 501.V2 mutation?**

The AstraZeneca vaccine is safe and effective, and is being used all over the world. For South Africa, however it was shown that it is less effective against the 501Y.V2 variant for people who are mildly ill. The 501Y.V2 variant is currently the dominant variant in the country. However, the AstraZeneca vaccine is still effective in protecting people against severe Covid-19 symptoms, hospitalisation and death caused by the 501Y.V2

The Johnson & Johnson trial has shown that its vaccine has proved effective against the 501.V2 Variant. Early results from Moderna also suggest its vaccine is effective against this variant. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is being tested to confirm that it protects against the new variants and early results from the trials are positive.

### **Can the AstraZeneca vaccine still be used?**

Developers of this vaccine have said that they are likely to introduce a modified version against the variant known as 501.V2 or B.1.351, later this year. Scientists will now discuss amongst themselves and they will advise us how the vaccine will be used.

It is important to note that the virus has mutated numerous times, and will continue to do so, as many other viruses do. Vaccine developers have the ability to redesign and tweak existing vaccines to better combat new variants in a matter of weeks or months if necessary, as they learn more about how the virus mutates.

### **Was the President, Minister and the country misled?**

All countries in the world are urgently awaiting lifesaving vaccines.

All vaccines were developed on the basis of the original SARS-COV-2 variant that was prevalent throughout the world. The vaccine, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University showed promise, and in clinical trials conducted in South Africa, people who



received the vaccine were 75 per cent less likely to develop mild to moderate cases of COVID-19 than were people who received a placebo.

The South African government has sought to acquire vaccines from a number of sources, including the global COVAX initiative. However, the government's process of procuring vaccines was already underway before the 501Y.V2 variant and other variants were discovered. . Before the efficacy results, South Africa could not delay receipt of the vaccine batches to await the results of the efficacy studies by our scientists, as this would have relegated the country to the back of the line for vaccines due to global shortage of supplies.

### **Was South Africa aware that the vaccines ordered would expire in April?**

It is important to note that the vaccines we acquired have not yet expired. In addition, the Department of Health, in the original vaccination plan, had planned the first phase of the AstraZeneca vaccine roll-out, to have been completed before the expiry date.

The April expiry date was confirmed through the implementation of our quality assurance and control protocols.

### **What is SA's recourse on the matter, are we sending the batch back?**

Although it has been found that the AstraZeneca vaccine does not work against mild and moderate illness, it could still offer protection against serious illness, hospitalisation or death. We will therefore be exploring all possible avenues before deciding on the appropriate course of action.

### **Why did South Africa take delivery of the AstraZeneca vaccine without knowing its efficacy against the variant that is most prevalent in the country?**

All countries pre-ordered vaccines as there is a global shortage of doses. Therefore, when doses were available for South Africa, we needed to proceed. However, our scientists started checking the efficacy of available vaccines immediately when they discovered the prevalence of the 501.V2 variant. This process is a laborious and detailed, and unfortunately was only completed when the country had already taken delivery of the first batch.

### **Will this be considered fruitless and wasteful expenditure?**

South Africa, along with the rest of the world finds itself in uncharted waters. Every moment is precious if we are to save lives and preserve our way of life. We will continue to explore all avenues to access lifesaving vaccines that are both safe and effective.

Our scientists will continue with further deliberations on the AstraZeneca vaccine use in South Africa, and depending on their advice, the vaccine will be swapped before the expiry date. By exchanging unused vaccines before the expiry date, the Department of Health will ensure that the acquired AstraZeneca vaccines do not become wasteful and fruitless expenditure.

### **How safe are these vaccines?**

Vaccines undergo rigorous testing for safety and efficacy, based on trial data from thousands of participants across the globe. Several national and international regulatory agencies have closely examined the COVID-19 vaccines for safety and effectiveness.



In South Africa we have an additional layer of safety. The SA Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) looks at all the scientific data to ensure the vaccine is safe, effective, and a quality product.

Additionally because COVID-19 vaccines were developed speedily, all regulators globally have put extra mechanisms in place to monitor them.