

OPENING REMARKS BY MINISTER OF HEALTH DR JOE PHAAHLA DURING MEDIA BRIEFING ON VACCINATION PROGRAMME UPDATE, FRIDAY 06 AUGUST 2021

- Thank you Programme Director Mr William Baloyi
- Good morning and welcome to everyone who has joined us for this press briefing which serves to update the public on the vaccination rollout programme and related activities
- Our ever present and supportive panellists who include:
 - **Professor Glenda Gray**, CEO for Medical Research Council
 - **Ms Jackie Maiman**, CEO for Pharmacy Association,
 - **Mr. Wesley Solomon**, Technical Assistant Support for the NHI and one of the EVDS team members
 - Director-General, **Dr Sandile Buthelezi**
 - **Dr Anban Pillay** and other Officials in the Department
 - Members of the media, our strategic partner in the fight against this pandemic
- Ladies and gentlemen

Let start by taking this opportunity that extend my deepest respect and gratitude to my predecessor and colleague Dr Zweli Mkhize for laying foundation in the Department, especially as far as the fight against COVID-19 is concerned.

Our beloved country South Africa has received accolades both locally and internationally for the manner in which we handled our response to

the pandemic under the leadership of President Ramaphosa and the NCCC.

Let me also thank the former Acting Minister and the colleague Mmamoloko Kubayi during her excellent job and her ability to adapt in the new environment where most of the decisions are based on scientific evidence than theories and personal opinions.

Programme Director, in the last 24 hours there were 13 777 new cases, which is an increase from that of the day before which had 13 263 new cases.

We remain concerned about the rise of numbers in the Western Cape which has become the epicentre of the pandemic. We are confident from the information we have received that the Western Cape Province has put containment measures in place to deal with rising hospitalizations and oxygen needs.

The National Department will continue to continuously work closely with the provinces and provide all the necessary support to in the containment efforts. Other provinces with numbers increasing at an alarming rate is KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Cape.

We are extremely pleased to inform the public that our vaccine supplies are stable and that we have over 10 million doses of vaccine in the country now. In August alone we expect to have received 20 million doses. The supply of vaccine has stabilised and for the remainder of the year we expect to take delivery of another 21 million doses that are on order.

This means that the Vaccination Programmes can be expanded to reach more people and can be accelerated to vaccinate more of our population quickly. Providers in the public and private sectors are all gearing up capacity to vaccinate by increasing the capacity of existing sites and by increasing the number of sites to areas where gaps have been identified. Now that the single shot J&J vaccine is available it is easier to reach some difficult to serve rural areas. Notwithstanding this vaccine security we are working to secure other vaccines. We have learnt that supply lines are always vulnerable, and immunity created to each vaccine may be quite different for the evolving variants that may appear.

The Vaccine Ministerial Advisory Committee (VMAC) and the National Essential Medicines Committee (NEMLC) have thoroughly examined the Sinovac and Astra Zeneca vaccines as possible additional vaccines for the country. Both are effective against the Delta variant and may be possible additional options in our fight against Covid-19.

We continue to hear a lot of fake news and misinformation generated by those who are opposed to vaccination. Many messages that we see, especially on social media, are false and are distributed irresponsibly to deliberately disrupt vaccination. The public are cautioned from believing what they read and are urged to verify the facts that are widely available on government and science platforms.

Dr Anban Pillay has joined us today to unpack the epidemiological trends that give us a better understanding of how the virus is spreading across the nine provinces. What these trends will illustrate is that the virus is still rapidly spreading which is why it is important for all us who

are eligible for vaccination, to register and vaccinate while continuing to practice the non-pharmaceutical interventions.

Studies have now shown that severe illness and deaths are reduced to a very insignificant levels amongst those who are vaccinated compared to those that are not vaccinated. I am simply saying that COVID-19 vaccination saves lives.

Yesterday I was in Limpopo Province as part of our ongoing countrywide monitoring the progress made and challenges experienced by provinces, and I was very impressed to note the appetite and demand for vaccine by people including grannies lining up to get vaccinated.

As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc in our lives, fake news and fake stories about vaccines and their effectiveness will continue to flood the media platforms with the aim of convincing people not to vaccinate as part of the plan by anti-vaxxers.

Thus, we are urge everyone to be careful of fake news and rather listen to science experts on Science related matters. Let us all be guided by Science on our fight against this fast spreading pandemic.

Professor Glenda Gray, who is globally renowned scientist, has joined again us today to share the results of the Sisonke Study on the effectiveness of the J&J vaccine. These are very important results which clearly show that vaccines save lives. The Sisonke Study has released a report on the implementation study of Ad26.COVS COVID-19 vaccine

(known to us as “JnJ Vaccine”).

We will then hear from Ms Jackie Maiman regarding the role of community pharmacies in the vaccination rollout. Jackie is the CEO the Independent Community Pharmacy Association. She will explain where the pharmacies fit into the programme and will provide some insights into the numbers of pharmacies participating and the plan to bring further pharmacies on board as vaccination sites.

These are generally the small pharmacies, many of which are in small towns scattered across the country. The private sector plays an important role in the programme but we seldom hear from the small independent players.

Finally, Mr Wesley Solomon, one of the EVDS team members will provide a demonstration of the enhanced Public Dashboard which went live last night. The dashboard on the SA-Coronavirus website is available for everyone to see the main statistics of the programme. The site has additional pages to give more granular data on the vaccination rollout with some granular drilldown into the data.

We have added this functionality to the dashboard in response to the requests from the public. Some of the additions include daily vaccination, gender and age distribution and population coverage. Wesley will take us through the illustrations and tables and show us where we can all access the information at all times.

It is important for the public to know where to find the information but also how to interpret what we see from the figures.

Let me pause here to allow the panellists to unpack their various topics.