



## — FROM THE DESK OF — THE PRESIDENT

• Monday, 25 January 2021 •

Dear Fellow South African,

Our country will soon receive its first consignment of COVID-19 vaccines from the Serum Institute in India, which is the world's largest vaccine producer.

It will signal the start of a mass vaccination campaign that will be the most ambitious and extensive in our country's history. It will reach all parts of the country and will be phased to ensure that those most in need are prioritised. The first vaccines to arrive will be provided to health care workers, who will be targeted in the first phase. The second phase will include essential workers, teachers, the elderly and those with co-morbidities. The third phase will include other adults in the population.

A comprehensive rollout strategy and an accompanying logistical framework will be implemented in partnership with the private sector, civil society, traditional leadership, the religious sector and others. It is vital that this is a society-wide campaign, in which everyone is involved and no-one is left behind.

A year after the novel coronavirus started spreading around the world, the arrival of the vaccine gives great hope for our country's social and economic recovery – and, most importantly, for the health of our people.

Given the unprecedented global demand for vaccine doses, combined with the far greater buying power of wealthier countries, we had to engage in extensive and protracted negotiations with manufacturers to secure enough vaccines to reach South Africa's adult population.

We have also worked closely with the global COVAX facility and the African Union's Vaccine Acquisition Task Team as part of the collective effort to secure vaccines for the world's low- and middle-income countries.

The doses that South Africa will receive through its participation in these initiatives, together with the agreements being made directly with manufacturers, should ensure that the country has sufficient vaccines to contain the spread of the virus.

From the moment the coronavirus first reached our shores in March last year, we have acted swiftly and decisively, and informed by the best available scientific evidence, to save lives and protect livelihoods. Through the measures we have taken, we have been able to contain infections, protect our health system and prevent an even greater loss of life.

Understanding that vaccines are essential if we are to overcome the pandemic, government has been working, both through multilateral initiatives and direct negotiations with manufacturers, to ensure South Africa can make the best use of vaccines when they become available.

There has been concern that government has not been sufficiently transparent about these efforts. However, as we did with the announcement on the Serum Institute, the details of deals with manufacturers will be released as and when negotiations are concluded and we are released from the communications terms of the non-disclosure agreements. This is commonplace in such circumstances, and most governments have had to comply with similar restrictions.

We recognise that it is important that the public must be kept abreast of developments on vaccine acquisition at all times. And government must be held to account for all the decisions it makes in this regard. Freedom of speech and open public debate are cornerstones of our democracy, as is the media's right to scrutinise and interrogate all government's policies and decisions.

Throughout the pandemic, government has been open and transparent with the South African people on the health measures it is taking to secure our people's safety. We have sought to explain all our decisions, to listen to people's concerns and to continuously update the country on the state of the disease.

When it comes to fighting a deadly pandemic like this, honesty and trust are just as valuable as any vaccine.

Through Government Communications, we have already embarked on an extensive communications campaign to educate the population about the COVID-19 vaccine, and to challenge many of the misconceptions in circulation.

All of us need to be part of this national effort and not allow the spread of rumours, fear and mistrust. False information and fake news can and does put lives at risk.

We all need to work together to build confidence in the vaccine, to demonstrate its effectiveness and its safety – and to emphasise its vital importance in overcoming this deadly disease.

For its part, government will work to improve all its channels of communication, to keep the public regularly informed on the development of the vaccination programme, to provide information that is accurate and factual, and to continue to engage with and listen to the broad range of voices in our society.

We have a massive task ahead of us, probably far greater than any of us has ever undertaken before.

But if we work together, if we support and trust each other and if we keep the lines of communication open, we will certainly succeed.

With best regards,



THE PRESIDENCY  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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