

**MEDIA STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR ZWELINI MKHIZE, ON THE
OUTCOMES OF THE VACCINE EFFICACY STUDIES**

09 FEBRUARY 2021

Fellow South Africans,

On Monday, 08 February 2021, I the Minister of Health, Dr Zwelini Mkhize- briefed the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Vaccination that is chaired by the Deputy President of the Republic, Honourable Mr. David Mabuza on the efficacy of the AstraZeneca vaccine against the 501Y.V2 variant of the Coronavirus, which is prevalent in South Africa. In turn, another briefing was made to the NCCC when the IMC tabled its reports on vaccination.

The South African government is committed to ensuring that we utilize the best options and approaches to protect our population from infections, including COVID-19. South Africa has well established protocols of ensuring safe use of all new health products and we are pleased our research system is working well, not only in ensuring quality control, but also by leading global research work on the study of the Coronavirus.

South African scientists and researchers commenced studies on the efficacy of various vaccines during 2020. They paid a dedicated focus on the impact of vaccines against the 501Y.V2 variant in the latter part of the year and in early January 2021. The results of these studies became available only on Friday, 05 February 2021 and publicly released on Sunday, 7th February 2021. It is as a result of this work, in which the government has directly invested, that it was established that the Astra Zeneca vaccine does not prevent mild to moderate disease of the 501Y.V2 variant. This timely finding has ensured that all measures are taken to utilize the most efficacious vaccine in our vaccination strategy.

All vaccines were developed on the basis of the original SARS-COV-2 variant that was prevalent throughout the world. The government's process of procuring vaccines

preceded the discovery of the 501Y.V2 variant and other variants. 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.

There are concerns in the public domain about the expiry date of the received AstraZeneca vaccine batches (30th April 2021). The vaccines have not expired. In addition, in keeping with the original vaccination plan, if the Department of Health were to proceed with the AstraZeneca vaccine roll-out, the doses would be used up by the expiry date. Furthermore, the April expiry date was not discovered by accident but through the implementation of our quality assurance and control protocols.

Given the outcomes of the efficacy studies, the Department of Health will continue with the planned phase 1 vaccination using the Johnson & Johnson vaccine instead of the AstraZeneca vaccine. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been proven effective against the 501Y.V2 variant and the necessary approval processes for use in South Africa are underway. The roll out of vaccination will proceed in the form of an implementation study with the partnership of the Medical Research Council and the National Department of Health vaccination sites across the country. This will provide valuable information about the pandemic in the post-vaccination community and thus, ensure early identification of breakthrough infections should they occur amongst vaccinated health workers.

In addition, the country has also secured doses from Pfizer for phase 1 roll-out. Our scientists are continuing to evaluate other candidates and we are simultaneously engaging manufactueres. We are in advanced stages of evaluating and engaging the manufacturers of the Sputnik -V candidate. Engagements with Sinopharm also continue with an offer made by China currently being considered. A Non Disclosure Agreement has been signed and the ratification processes in SAHPRA is in progress. Similarly, our engagements with Moderna are ongoing and we will make further announcements, as we always do, when we are in a position to do so.

On the other hand, 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.

Meanwhile, we wish to remind fellow citizens that the mainstay of preventing COVID-19, until the country reaches population immunity, remains the continued adherence to health protocols of washing hands with soap or 70% alcohol-based sanitizer, wearing of masks in public, and to keep to the 1.5 meters social distance.

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