

MEMO

To: Private Health Sector Stakeholders

From: The Hospital Association of South Africa

Date: 24 February 2021

Memorandum: Cooperation is key to an effective vaccine rollout

The Hospital Association of South Africa commends and thanks the Minister of Health, and his officials in the Department of Health, the South African Medical Research Council, and everyone else who contributed to securing vaccines for the country.

We also extend our thanks to those who planned and implemented the national vaccine launch last week and the expansion of the rollout over the past weekend to include private sector healthcare workers.

Additionally, the Minister of Health has already announced the procurement of millions more doses of vaccines that will follow the estimated 300 000 – 500 000 doses of the Johnson&Johnson vaccine. The J&J vaccine is being made available over the next 6 – 8 weeks as part of an early access programme which provides the vaccine to health care workers as part of an open label vaccine study (phase 3b trial). The first batch of 80 000 vaccines that arrived in the country last week to launch the national vaccination programme will be followed by bi-weekly consignments of vaccines, with 30% available to the private hospital sector and associated healthcare workers. Comprehensive efforts have therefore been made to ensure everyone working in the healthcare sector will soon have access to vaccines.

However, due to the limited vaccines available at this juncture, it is critical to risk-stratify healthcare workers to ensure that those prioritised for protection are vaccinated first, namely healthcare workers at high risk of contracting coronavirus in the workplace. The risk assessment includes the risk of exposure and transmission from treating high volumes of critically ill COVID-19 patients, in hospitals, and also by regularly performing high risk aerosol-generating procedures on these patients.

For this reason, it is concerning to note that reports are surfacing that suggest that prioritised healthcare workers' access to their allocated vaccinations may be compromised as some healthcare workers have accessed vaccines out of turn. It has become necessary to put additional protocols in place to govern the process.

The challenge facing us is already considerable, given the looming 3rd wave of infections that could, if global experience holds, exert pressure on the healthcare system yet again. We believe it is critically important that we work together to protect our healthcare system, and simultaneously ensure that we build a vaccination programme that is most beneficial to first protect healthcare workers.

We invite all healthcare professionals to join us in our commitment to quickly, collectively, and safely, reach our joint post-pandemic future.