

FOR PSA MEMBERS: *GENERAL 4/2021*

18 February 2021

COVID-19: J&J vaccine rollout update

A virtual meeting was held on 15 February 2021 with the labour principals and the National Department of Health regarding the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) vaccine rollout owing to the AstraZeneca vaccine being replaced based on ineffectiveness on the South African COVID variant.

A total of 300 000 J&J vaccines will be received from Belgium. The first batch of 80 000 vaccines have arrived in the country and the rest will follow shortly. Only a number of macro hospitals are identified in the provinces from where these vaccines will be accessible to all health workers as per the rollout program. Healthcare workers will be inoculated first as they are three times more likely than the general population to be infected.

The rollout process will commence from 17 February 2021 and all members who are interested in being vaccinated can register at <https://vaccine.enroll.health.gov.za>. The rollout will be done in three phases. Phase 1 will target healthcare workers, Phase 2 includes essential workers, persons in congregate settings and persons over the age of 18 with co-morbidities. Phase 3 includes all persons over the age of 18.

Various concerns were raised during the discussions, including the following:

How effective are these vaccines?

The Department responded in that it is 85% effective against the variant that is detected in South Africa and 43 783 people across the world, including 6 576 people in South Africa, have undergone clinical trials with results of 100% against death/mortality.

Why is it coined as a research\study program?

The explanation is that the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) is still finalizing its licensing process of the vaccine, but it would be unethical not to allow the use of the vaccine as it is proven to be effective. This is similar to, for example, a new car not being licensed immediately and being issued with a temporary license until the number plates are issued. Other countries had their regulatory bodies issued license for the same vaccine.

Various issues were addressed during this consultation and as part of the awareness campaign, the PSA management team will also participate in the vaccination rollout. The main aim with the vaccination process is to ensure large-scale immunity. The PSA wants to reiterate that each person needs to take a personal decision on taking the vaccine.

GENERAL MANAGER