



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists
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Health Department responds to reports on Vaccination and Women's Health

Pretoria: The Department of Health has noted with concern the public statements made by individuals and stakeholders including the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) which issued a media statement on 17 January 2022, titled "*Warning Against Imposing Mandatory Covid-19 Vaccination on Employees and Students*".

The Department respects the freedom of expression by any individual or organisation as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic. However, we believe such freedom should be exercised responsibly to impart information or ideas to empower our people to make well informed health choices during these difficult times.

It is of concern that the statement released by the CGE on menstrual irregularities associated with COVID-19 vaccines appears to have been done without consultation with any of expert institutions. The statement has not considered all available evidence and the substantial benefit associated with vaccinating women of reproductive age and pregnant women. The Department is in agreement and support the statement released yesterday by various organizations in the Health sector, including the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) in disputing the facts as presented by the CGE.

COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective against severe illness, and immunising women of reproductive age is important as both South African and global data have clearly shown that SARS-CoV-2 infection in pregnancy significantly worsens obstetric and neonatal outcomes, making it imperative that vaccination programmes target young women before and during pregnancy.

It is also important to emphasize that, the current discussions around vaccine mandate have no bearing on the effectiveness and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, and we dismiss any argument against the constitutionality of vaccine mandate based on fallacious and non-scientific evidence.

The Minister is advised by committees of highly qualified scientists and clinicians, including the Ministerial Advisory Committee of Vaccines (VMAC) and National

Immunisation Safety Expert Committee (NISEC) whose mandate entails reviewing vaccine safety data and make recommendations on safe vaccine use.

In addition, the South African Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (SASOG) and the South African Medical Association (SAMA), also offer evidence-based recommendations to their membership on vaccine use.

The conclusion by the Commission that 'many women may not be comfortable taking vaccines, due to possible long-term effects' is not supported by data and is not based on a risk benefit analysis. Furthermore, the CGE's statement may contribute to misinformation and needless vaccine hesitancy in young women, and at its worst, could contribute to maternal and neonatal deaths.

Thus, we would like to implore anyone with different views and theories on the effectiveness of vaccines, to back their comments and arguments with scientific evidence, and share data with government for the benefit of the entire population.

The Department will remain open and accessible to any individual, public or private organisations to discuss any concerns, recommendations and inputs they have around COVID-19 vaccine, and will also be engaging the CGE further on the matter.

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