

# Vaccinate for a normal way of life

The *Lets vaccinate* campaign encourages support for the government's Covid-19 vaccination drive and to counter vaccine hesitancy, while debunking myths around the vaccine and giving assurances regarding its safety and efficacy.



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This lies at the heart of the *Lets vaccinate* campaign says Dr Katlego Mothudi, managing director of the Board of Healthcare Funders (BHF). The campaign is an initiative that came from the health funders that are members BHF.

Using the *Lets vaccinate* campaign, medical schemes plan to encourage citizens to vaccinate by improving the quality of information and allay the current inaccurate information available to the public.

Affiliates of the BHF would like to see at least 70% to 90% of the population vaccinated by the end of the year in support of vaccine targets to attain disease containment.

As part of the effort to support the vaccination drive, some healthcare funders have set up vaccination sites across the country to provide easy access to the vaccination programme.

## Vaccines work

Mothudi says that the point of departure is that vaccines work, and more people need to be vaccinated to contain this virus.

“The data we have received from around the world has scientifically proven that the Covid-19 vaccine has played a crucial role in preventing deaths and undue hospitalisation. This has been critical in relieving the burden on our healthcare facilities,” he states.

“We should not be blind to the role that vaccines have played even before the outbreak of Covid-19 – this includes flu vaccines which helped many people with a weak immune system, such as children and the elderly, from contracting pneumonia during the flu season,” he adds.

He cautions that vaccines are not a cure, as people can still contract Covid-19 even after they have taken the jab.

“Vaccines do not eliminate the possibility of getting infected, but vaccinated people have as much as a tenfold reduction in the possibility of becoming severely ill and hospitalised. There is a proven margin that shows that the vaccines that are currently on the market or in rotation are actually working,” says Mothudi.

## Covid-19 vaccines are safe

He also vouches for the safety of the Covid-19 vaccines, and points out that these have undergone the necessary clinical trials as well as independent and stringent safety and efficacy tests by regulatory bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States and the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) before they are released to the market.

“We must accept that any medication, whether it is paracetamol or another common pain tablet, will have side effects, and Covid-19 vaccines are no different.

“This is because we are not built the same – some people’s immune systems become overactive when they detect foreign matter, and in some cases, they even reacts to the body’s own products,” he explains.

For example, there are people who have what is called autoimmune disorders where the body recognises its own proteins as abnormal. “No chemical or medicine is fool proof, but a drug will not be released to the market when it is deemed to be unsafe,” he emphasises.

## Making informed decisions

Mothudi has dismissed claims that Covid-19 is a means used for population control, pointing out that the pandemic is a global phenomenon that doesn’t discriminate against any particular population group.

“The sceptical attitude towards treatment of any novel diseases is not new. The same questions that we are dealing with now pertaining to the origins of the virus and the efficacy of the treatment were raised when the HIV/AIDS pandemic was at its peak about 20 to 30 years ago when we didn’t have enough data on it,” he says.



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These are the same concerns that we are experiencing now with the Covid-19 pandemic. “History is repeating itself and we seem to be back to where we were, but we must deal with the issues of information better in this era and make more informed decisions to curb the impact that this pandemic can have on our population,” says Mothudi.

“We have to vaccinate to return to a normal way of life and economic activity. We just cannot afford to wait for the next peak season of this pandemic, and the next lockdown, to be vaccinated. We need to vaccinate now, so that when the next

peak season comes, we have a bigger population group vaccinated to contain the devastating impact that this virus has shown to have,” he states.

The BHF is the biggest representative body of the healthcare funding industry, representing health funders, administrators and managed care organisations in South Africa and across the African region, with membership in South Africa, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi and Swaziland.

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