



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION MRS ANGIE MOTSHEKGA DELIVERED AT THE MEDIA BRIEFING ON THE RESPONSE OF THE SECTOR TO COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON SCHOOLING

19 JUNE 2021

Greeting to everybody present in the media briefing, and to those watching on various platforms.

The Council of Education Ministers (CEM) held a special meeting this morning to consider a reports from the Department of Health on the latest developments regarding the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. A plan for the vaccination programme was presented to CEM and we are pleased with the progress made especially for the basic education sector.

As a sector, we made a request weeks ago, for teachers and support staff in basic education to be vaccinated as a matter of urgency.

The request was made in the context of the learning losses already suffered since March 2020, as a direct result of COVID-19. The truth is that recovery is not possible in the short-term. Our researchers have done a lot of work to try quantify the extent of the teaching and learning losses in the sector. The question is, what do we do now?

There is a difficult balancing act we need to achieve. I will come back to this point in a short while.

The CEM welcomed the announcement by the President that vaccines for the Basic Education Sector had been secured. The CEM also welcomed the subsequent announcement by the Acting Minister of Health, Ms Mamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane that our sector could now proceed with vaccinating of our educators and support staff. As you may already know, the vaccines have arrived, and are in the process of being distributed to all provinces. Provinces confirmed today that they are ready for the vaccination programme.

The Departments of Health and Basic Education have been working around the clock in the past few weeks, to finalise a plan on the vaccination of our educators and support staff. We have also been working very closely with our stakeholders, who have contributed immensely in ensuring the success of the vaccination programme.

Subsequent to the CEM meeting today, we held consultation sessions with key stakeholders, including teacher unions, national associations responsible for governance in public schools, learners with special education needs, independent schools, and the South African Principals Association to appraise them on the latest developments, regarding the sector's response to COVID-19. I am glad to announce that we are all in agreement regarding the approach to be taken from today onwards.

With the support and guidance from the Department of Health, the vaccination programme will unfold in the Basic Education Sector with immediate effect.

“Drop all, and vaccinate!”

The vaccination programme will start on Wednesday, 23rd June 2021, and it will continue until Thursday, 8th July 2021, a day before schools close to mark the end of the second school term.

Those to be vaccinated are –

- **All PERSAL Staff (as at April 2021) in DBE** (educators, administrative and support staff) at all public schools; irrespective of their age;
- School Governing Body appointed teachers, and those teachers employed by independent schools registered in terms of the South African Schools Act;
- **We have five hundred and eighty-two thousand (582 000) persons** to be vaccinated over 10 to 14 days (weekdays and weekends); or 7 to 10 days (if it is weekdays only);
- **A strict registration process** will be followed, as follows –
 - **If you are PERSAL staff member, your details have already been captured onto the Electronic Vaccination Data System (EVDS);**
 - Lists for **SGB appointees and independent school educators** will be uploaded onto the EVDS;
 - **On-site data capturing** will be required for individual's cell numbers; and medical aid details;
 - **There will be NO ON-SITE registrations** – that means persons not bulk uploaded in the EVDS, cannot be registered on-site; and therefore, cannot be vaccinated. Should this happen to you, the on-site officials will help you on the steps to be followed for assistance;

- The Departments of Health and Basic Education at provincial and district levels, will work together to link schools to identified vaccination sites; and
- ***The verification of basic education staff*** – where the EVDS is offline due to power outages, will require a list or letters signed-off by the staff respective principals.

We need to note however that there are exclusion criteria; which means that there are some people, who may not qualify to be vaccinated. These individual may include, but not limited to –

- Any person who had contracted COVID-19 in the past 30 days;
- Any person who was vaccinated using another vaccine (Pfizer or Johnson & Johnson, under Sisonke); or
- Any person who had received a flu vaccine in the past 14 days.

In our deliberations with the Department of Health, it was further agreed that the vaccination programme must cover –

- Staff who transport children to and from schools;
- Staff who support the school feeding scheme – here we refer to the food handlers;
- Staff who do remote learning programmes (TV and Radio); and
- Staff of Teacher Unions, and indeed other contracted staff who provide security, do cleaning and other functions at school.

Vaccination is voluntary but highly recommended so that everybody can be protected. Let us work together on this fight against COVID-19 in our spaces.

Everybody is expected to make their own transport arrangements. Where there are challenges schools will need to assist.

For the next two weeks, we make the clarion call to our school communities to “***DROP ALL, AND VACCINATE!***” In order for us to successfully complete this programme, we will need to keep schools open. Any disruptions would be undesirable. The vaccination of everybody in the sector is an opportunity to normalize schooling and begin the process of mitigating the impact of COVID-19.

We need to work extremely hard and around the clock to vaccinate as many people as possible in our sector. ***Vaccinating does not mean that we need to stop adhering to the non-pharmaceutical health and safety protocols.*** The scientists have told us that the vaccines do not provide 100 percent protection against the virus; even though they are very important in the fight against COVID-19. We therefore, need to continue to strictly adhere to the non-pharmaceutical measures to curb the spread of the virus.

The Management of COVID-19 Cases in Schools

We urge all our schools to apply the Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) when managing COVID-19 related cases. ***Every school must have a COVID-19 committee, a COVID-19 file, and compliance officers.***

I said earlier that doing business under COVID-19, means that one needs to also strike a balance between saving lives and livelihoods. In the case of the Basic Education Sector, this means that we need to do all that we can to prevent a potential academic disaster. At all times, we follow the advice of public health experts, who are

supporting us in the management of the impact of COVID-19. We believe that schools must remain open and in saying so we are not insensitive to the concerns raised about the rising infections. The position is that we continue to handle COVID cases according to the differentiated strategy, on a province by province, school-by-school basis. While there are disruptions in the sector, the majority of our schools remain fairly stable. Our social partners and key stakeholders expressed the same view in our engagement earlier today.

We will however take guidance from structures such as the Ministerial Advisory Committee, NCCC and Cabinet on this matter as part of a wider approach in the fight against COVID. There has to be scientific reasons for all decisions that are taken.

State of readiness for return of primary school learners

On the 28th May 2021, we issued a Government Gazette, in which we announced that ***primary school learners would return to school on the first day of the Third School Term on 26 July 2021.*** The decision was canvassed adequately within the sector, with key stakeholders making inputs in the process. We were guided by various studies, which looked into the teaching and learning losses already suffered in the sector; the scientific evidence regarding the impact of COVID-19 on younger children; as well as the advice from the medical fraternity. Cabinet approved and supported the proposal by the sector, to prepare for the return of traditional time-tabling at primary school level with effect from the first day of the Third School Term on 28 July 2021.

We gave ourselves two months to prepare for this mammoth task. At the moment, provinces are at various stages of readiness in terms of the return of all primary school learners to school on a daily basis.

We are aware that there are many variables that will make this task a success. The DBE is currently holding one-on-one sessions with each Provincial Education Department to check on their state of readiness.

On learner support programmes during COVID-19 pandemic

I would like to take this opportunity to remind parents, guardians and our children that the Department and its partners continue to use alternative means of providing curriculum material.

The ***WOZA Matrics 2021 Catch-Up Programme*** and the ***Tswelopele Campaigns*** are initiatives established by the DBE, in collaboration with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT).

These are national supplementary remote learning campaigns, developed to support 2021 matric learners and learners in the General Education & Training Band (GET) from Grades R to 9, with supplementary support content, that will enable learners to catch-up on learning losses; and enable them to enhance, acquire and develop crucial knowledge, skills, attitudes and values during the academic year.

The two campaigns provide digital and non-digital learning resources in partnership with a range of content providers through the DBE-TV on Open-View Channel 122, SABC 1 and DSTV Catch-Up, YouTube channels, as well as digital and mobile chat platforms. These platforms were put in place to minimize the negative impact of COVID-19 on learning, and to provide further learning opportunities in the context of the restrictions that are currently in place.

Second Chance Matric Examinations

The Second Chance Matric Examinations are proceeding well. These examinations started on 26 May 2021, and yesterday, was Day 17; which leaves us with 13 more days. The only concern, are the protest actions in Harrismith, Free State, where the examinations are disrupted. The Department is looking to other options to assist the candidates in this area.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the MECs, HoDs of PEDs, our social partners and stakeholders, as well as all colleagues in the sector, for the work done thus far. We are living under difficult circumstances that require commitment, dedication, sacrifice, and selflessness. We need to ensure that, in all that we do, we put health and safety as an apex priority. We convey our condolences to all families who have lost their loved ones due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is required now is vigilance, alertness, and most of all strict adherence to the health and safety measures, that have been put in place. Keep safe!

Thank you