

# **STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF HEALTH DR JOE PHAAHLA ON THE REPEAL OF REGULATIONS ON NOTIFIABLE MEDICAL CONDITIONS DEALING WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ON MONKEY-POX**

**Thursday, June 2022**

Programme Director,  
Minister in the Presidency Mondli Gungubele  
Provincial MECs present,  
Director-General, Dr S Buthelezi,  
Chairpersons of Ministerial Advisory Committees,  
Health Management Team  
Members of the Media

Today is a very historic day as we have reached a turning point since the outbreak of Covid-19 in the world and in the country. We recall that our first case was confirmed on 5 March 2020 in Pietermaritzburg from a South African who had travelled to Europe.

The President of the Republic, President Cyril Ramaphosa constituted the National Coronavirus Command Council and following its meeting he announced on 16 March 2020 that a nationwide lockdown would start on midnight of 19 March 2020 with a strict stay at home unless you had permission to undertake essential services. Since then four full waves of the pandemic have ensued with the first 3 waves causing devastation with loss of lives across all sectors of society including health workers.

Disruptions of social and economic life have been huge most painful being families unable to visit loved ones who were seriously ill in hospital and for those who passed away, being buried under strict conditions. On the economic side, major losses of jobs and closure of several business especially SMME'S but even big hotels, airlines etc.

To delay the spread and allow health facilities to prepare capacity, even as the strict lockdown was lifted a risk adjusted strategy was used to reduce the spread of the virus.

In February 2021 we started vaccination under the Sisonke program led by the MRC starting with health workers and following with Education. In May 2021 when we started with the high risk age group of 60+ and progressively rolled out vaccination until we could open for 12-17 years old in November 2021.

We want to take this opportunity on behalf of all government to thank South Africans for their support and cooperation over the last 2 years and 3 months. While there was a lot of common ground and agreement even across political lines early in the pandemic when we all thought it would be short and over within a few months, the longer it took more fatigue and disagreements on strategy started to surface. We appreciate the fact that notwithstanding the disagreements even leading to threats or even actual court actions the mainframe of our collective action remained until today. We thank South Africans for resilience in internalizing various measures of prevention and mitigation against the virus some of which will help us in dealing with some older respiratory diseases such as influenza and TB but also future respiratory epidemics.

We thank the collective leadership of our country across all sectors such as faith-based, civil society, traditional, business, academia, youth, women etc. for rising to the occasion. Even though we did not realise our goal of vaccinating at least 70% of the adult population, we take solace in that as on 22 June 36,700m vaccine doses have been administered to 20.09m adults and 1,9 children of 12-17 year old giving a total average of 50.48% with at least one dose. We applaud the big turnout of the 60+ age group who are at risk with a 70, 5% turnout and the next high risk of 50-59 years with a 66, 17% turnout.

We believe that the big turnout of the 50+ age group contributed hugely to the reduced severity hospitalization and mortality witnessed in the fourth wave and persistent up to today.

We also want to recognize the best performing province in the vaccination program, the Free State for being the only province which has reached 60% of coverage of their adult population at 60.15%. They started slow but soon picked up pace towards the end of 2021 and never looked back.

Just behind them in the mid-band are Western Cape at 57.37%, Limpopo 57%, Eastern Cape 54.53% and N. Cape at 51.45%. Gauteng has the highest in absolute numbers at 5.4m individuals vaccinated but low in percentage at 47.8% due to a huge population size together with KZN, N-West and Mpumalanga have reached a coverage of below 50%

The Omicron variant driving the fourth wave with its rapid spread affecting the highest number of people at a very short time led to increased natural immunity.

In March this year when the impact of the 4<sup>th</sup>

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