

GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI



COVID-19 VACCINE UPDATE

The COVID-19 pandemic is predominant the world over and continues to bring great pain, suffering and uncertainty to every nation.

Indeed the Kingdom of Eswatini has not been spared the agony of the daily experiences of this dreadful pandemic. Families have lost loved ones, many workers have lost jobs thus altering their livelihoods and many businesses have closed down. First line responders in the health and security sectors and in other critical service sectors have also suffered the brunt of this brutal pandemic.

Food insecurity has been worsened and we continue to hear of unfortunate reports of increased domestic violence exacerbated by the effects of this pandemic as it pounds all nations, big and small, rich or poor. Education continues to suffer the consequences of this pandemic across the world while mental health issues are sadly on the rise.

Inevitably, the world needs to be united and fight this together. The world is indeed fiercely and relentlessly looking for solutions to overcome the spread of this pandemic.

As a Nation we long joined in the frantic efforts to protect our Kingdom. Let me remind this great nation that His Majesty's Government put in place key non-pharmaceutical interventions enforced through regulations and Ministerial directives aimed at containing and reducing the raging transmission of the virus in the country. It is important to emphasise that we expect all Emaswati to adhere to these regulations and relevant directives to save the nation.

Currently, we are deep in the midst of a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in an exponential increase in numbers of people infected and those presenting with severe disease. The need to increase the number of health workers to provide services in the COVID-19 response towards controlling the pandemic in the country cannot be over emphasised. Services to be provided include educating, screening, swabbing and testing and linkage to care for those found to have been infected with COVID-19, as part of operation "Stay Ahead of the Virus".

As a result, Government is hiring an additional 70 health workers to increase the number of trained health workers who participate in the COVID-19 response activities and improve the COVID-19 response to reduce the impact of

the COVID-19 pandemic to the population. The new staff to be engaged includes health workers who have recently graduated from health training institutions in the country.

It is apparent that because of high numbers, the health system is stretched; particularly for critical and severe illness where people need additional support and oxygen. Efforts have been made to double local production of oxygen in December 2020; however this is not enough as the demand is very high. We have enough ventilators but these need us to have volumes of oxygen as well.

Critical care spaces have been created in nearly all hospitals in the country, both public and private. We are working together and sharing resources such as ventilators and oxygen. Government supports private hospitals with these commodities as much as is possible.

One of the key strategies to fight COVID-19 is the introduction of a safe and effective vaccine. The Kingdom is fully committed to introducing the COVID-19 vaccine as one of the interventions aimed at reducing the infection rate in the country. Let me remind Emaswati that the introduction of a vaccine in the country will not be new nor a first time initiative as we have seen the successful use of polio vaccines in the Kingdom, among others.

With regard to the COVID-19 vaccine, the country is part of the COVAX facility that is coordinating the availability of vaccines to low and middle income countries that have

signed up to this facility. The COVAX facility will coordinate the choice of vaccines to be made available from which countries will select the one they will be using.

The Kingdom of Eswatini is in the process of preparing for the implementation of a nationwide programme of effective vaccination against COVID-19.

Government will set aside a budget of at least **E200 million** towards securing COVID-19 vaccines at volumes sufficient to vaccinate all the people of Eswatini.

Our development and cooperating partners have also joined forces and some have already pledged support towards this noble exercise. These include the Republic of Taiwan; which has graciously committed US\$500 000 towards the procurement of additional COVID-19 vaccines. It is strongly believed that these resources will not only be sufficient to secure adequate vaccines for emaSwati but also supplement the additional budget needed to continue the efforts of combating the scourge.

At this point, let me further inform the nation that the Ministry of Health has established a COVID-19 Vaccine Preparedness Team that is working around the clock to put in place the necessary logistics that will enable the procurement, delivery and storage of the vaccines once in the country.

The team is also developing a plan for the rollout of the vaccine to the population, taking into consideration priority groups such as front-line workers and the elderly population.

It should be noted that the Government is fully committed to ensuring that all people residing in the country receive the COVID-19 vaccine, in order to ensure that all are protected from COVID-19.

The first batch of the COVID-19 vaccines is expected to be made available in the first quarter of 2021 from the COVAX Facility. The Nation will be kept informed by His Majesty's Government on the developments with regard to the timelines for the vaccine delivery and rollout, the type of vaccines to be made available in the country and further public education on the COVID-19 vaccines.

The nation must work together. Stay at home if you do not have to go anywhere. Isolate properly at home when you can; to prevent infecting more family members. Take your treatment at home as directed. Adhere to all health protocols as guided.

Senator Themba Nhlanganiso Masuku

ACTING PRIME MINISTER

3 January 2021