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APRIL 2021

**LET'S VACCINATE  
AGAINST COVID-19  
AND SAVE OUR LIVES**

**DO NOT PANIC!!!  
YOU, TOO, WILL GET THE  
COVID-19 VACCINE**



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**  
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**MS NOMAGUGU SIMELANE**  
MEC FOR HEALTH

## LET'S VACCINATE AGAINST COVID-19 AND SAVE OUR LIVES

Together we have come this far and WILL certainly go further if we make the right choice to get VACCINATED against COVID-19.

Fellow people of KwaZulu Natal, it's time to grab this opportunity to vaccinate for free with both hands and be protected. Phase 1 of the KZN Vaccination Roll out Programme, which is targeting frontline healthcare workers, is underway.

The Department would like to thank and commend all health workers who have already come forward for their inoculation. We would like to encourage more health workers to follow suit and get their jab too.

The roll out programme will be gradually extended to include more sites (in addition to Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital and Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital) and categories of people, as the province continues to receive more batches of the vaccine. Ultimately, everyone will get the vaccine, but the programme is currently unfolding in a phased approach as follows:

- Phase I:** Frontline health care workers
- Phase II:** Essential Workers, persons over 60 years and 18 years with co-morbidities
- Phase III:** Other persons over 18 years

From birth vaccination has always been part of our lives. There is really nothing to fear because the COVID-19 vaccine will work the same way other vaccines do for numerous diseases like polio, HPV, chicken pox, measles and many more. We will be able to get to the herd immunity phase only if we all come forward to get vaccinated. It really is in our hands to shape our future and ensure that we enjoy a long healthy life. Let's do it for ourselves, our families, our communities, our beautiful province and our beloved country.

The Department would like to thank the people of KwaZulu Natal for their unwavering support and participation in the fight against COVID-19. Many thanks for your adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocols as well as the demonstration of responsible social behaviour. Let us, however, not let our guard down in lockdown level 1. We still need to minimize the risk of getting infected by:

- Wearing our masks at all times.
- Washing our hands with soap and water or cleansing them with an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Maintaining social distancing from one another.

**Choose vaccination live!**

## DO NOT PANIC!!! YOU TOO, WILL GET THE COVID - 19 VACCINE

We would like to reassure all healthcare workers, frontline workers (police officers, teachers, financial services staff and other categories of people who interface with the public) and citizens across the province that they, too, will soon get the COVID - 19 vaccine.

We have not forgotten about you, and you will get an opportunity to get vaccinated once more doses become available. As Government, we fully understand the urgency of the need to get as many people vaccinated as possible, so that we achieve population immunity.

The roll-out of the vaccine to more sites will ensure that more people, even in the far flung areas of our province, will have convenient access to the programme.



**DR SANDILE TSHABALALA**  
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

We therefore appeal to all sectors of society to be patient, and await their turn.

The COVID - 19 vaccination roll-out programme was launched immediately after the arrival of the first batch of vaccines on the 18th of February 2021 and began in earnest in two designated sites:

- Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital with 10 vaccination stations
- Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital with 20 vaccination stations

The Department then moved swiftly to expand the programme by identifying more sites in other districts in order to maximize population reach, even though the focus is on health workers for now, as part of the first phase.



# KZN COMMEMORATES ONE YEAR SINCE THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK



**On 05 March 2020 South Africa marked one year since the outbreak of COVID-19 in KwaZulu Natal. National Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize together with KZN Premier Mr Sihle Zikalala and KZN Health MEC Ms Nomagugu Simelane reflected on the one-year anniversary of battling with the Novel Coronavirus at Grey's Hospital, the first institution assigned to take on patient zero.**

MEC Simelane recalled, "When I first heard the news that we had our first patient, I couldn't believe it. I was not sure if it was true, whether it was fake news. I was frantic.

Before that, we had already been preparing the province so that if a positive case arrived, we would be

prepared. However, we did not think that the first case in the country would be in KZN. Nevertheless, after that first case, life as we knew it changed forever, for all health workers and all the people of the country."

Echoing her experience, Dr Bradley Naidoo, a junior doctor who was one of the

health professionals on call when patient zero arrived at Grey's Hospital recounted,

"I remember quite clearly the weeks preceding our first admission. There was lots of news overseas about a new respiratory virus that had taken hold in Asia. At first, we thought, much like previous coronaviruses,

it would stay confined in those areas but as news cropped up of cases occurring in other countries, in European countries, the Americas, I think there was a real sense of inevitability that the coronavirus would reach our shores.

"At this point the corridors were full of talk of how severe the disease was, would we be getting it, would we be ready for it and how would we be best tackling it and there was a real sense of anxiety, fear and trepidation in the air at that point. I remember the night the first patient came in quite well. It was actually my last night shift before I was scheduled to go on leave, relatively a good night at the hospital. But around midnight, I received a call saying that there was a coronavirus case that the ambulance drivers would be bringing, to please open our isolation unit and admit the patient.

Our senior doctors and nursing staff came out and I think it must have been almost an hour or so before the patient came in but that one hour felt like one day. A million thoughts rushed through my mind at that point regarding the patient. With all this news from overseas, speaking about how sick people were, we were wondering how sick this individual would be. Would they need oxygen? Would they need ICU? What care could we give them because there was so little known at that point.

Thoughts also went through to my own personal safety

as well as the safety of the team around us. Much in those proceeding weeks was done by our minister, our MEC, our leaders and our local hospital team to set up an isolation area, to make sure that the area was safe and conducive to our patient and ourselves.

Amazing work was done by our Infection Prevention Control (IPC) sisters and team in terms of securing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), training us how to use the PPE which is now called "donning and doffing". All of this came to play that one fateful night. However, so many thoughts went through our minds as to whether the PPE would work, would we be exposed, what would happen if our PPE failed when we saw to the patient.

But despite all of that we put our patient first and we made sure that we took care of them before anything else. The first few days were incredibly dynamic in a sense that things that we all took for granted, being able to just see a patient normally, write notes normally, go in and prescribe medication, take blood tests and do testing, all became a very unique challenge and many people with incredible ideas had to step up to find solutions for these problems. Simple things, like every bit of stationery or paper that went in to see the patient, had to remain there for infection control purposes."

A year later, after many Government interventions such as contracting more

than 10 000 employees, much has changed. At the event MEC announced that only 7% of the COVID-19 beds were in use and the number of infections had drastically decreased in the province. The province also celebrated the roll-out of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine which had initially been distributed to health professionals in Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital and Inkosi Albert Luthuli Hospital and recently Edendale Hospital.

Indeed, the country and province seem to have overcome the major hurdles over COVID-19, although there are real fears of a deadly third wave of the virus. However, MEC Simelane acknowledged that it would not have been possible without the commitment of the thousands of health workers within the Department's arsenal. The Minister, the Premier and the MEC acknowledged those that had fallen in the fight in a candle lighting ceremony.

Mandy Nyawo, a professional nurse praised the constant support and information from her facility's management for her ability to remain positive and diligent. "What I really like is that our Government has released the vaccine and we hope that the number of people who are sick, who will die, will be lower because the Government has procured the vaccine. Thank you very much. We are all keenly awaiting our chance to get vaccinated."



# MORE REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19 JOURNEY: UKZN'S PROFESSOR MOSA MOSHABELA



One year after COVID-19 arrived in KwaZulu-Natal, we are looking back to reflect on the long journey we have travelled together during a period of difficulty for the world, the country, our communities and our households. We must first recognize that, in many respects, this has been a time of suffering, anger, frustration, pain and loss. We should pay our respects to those who lost their lives prematurely because of COVID-19.

For now though, I wish for us to take a brief moment just to look back over the past year, and acknowledge a few realities that have taught us lessons, and hopefully these lessons can help inform our wisdom as we move forward in our journey to navigate this global pandemic. The first reality I'd like to acknowledge is that the virus that causes COVID-19 came from China, and spread throughout the world. The lesson here is that we may be sitting in a small rural town in KwaZulu-Natal, but we must always remember that we are connected with the rest of the world. The boundaries of national borders and vast seas between continents are also artificial barriers, and our connectedness as part of a global community remind us that what happens in China will eventually affect us here in KwaZulu-Natal. We must therefore pay attention to all that is happening in the world, and recognize that what happens in one place can also happen here in South Africa.

We have seen this in the way the new variant of the virus first identified in South Africa can now be found in different parts of the world, the reverse of what we saw with the virus spreading from China eventually coming to South Africa.

The second reality for me is that those of us who are privileged enough to travel the globe can act as carriers of disease from exotic parts of this world and bring them to local communities who may never have left their own district or village. We travel from overseas to local cities, and bring diseases to those who have never left the country. Those in cities travel to villages to bring diseases to those who have never left the village. At the core of this carrier state of diseases is the reality of socioeconomic status or social class, one's ability to afford

seen through the lens of inequality. We may kick and scream and wish to deny this reality, but this must be acknowledged. I should also say that diseases of poverty can also be carried from villages to cities and to the rest of the world, and this is why people talk about global health security, often seen through the lens of national borders. Nevertheless, it is my hope that we can acknowledge this reality, and endeavour to build the kind of social protection that can ensure that we are all committed to each other's wellbeing, given the fact that, directly or indirectly, we can pose a health risk to one another.

The third reality I'd like to acknowledge, is one about our relationships as humans with animals. It has not escaped me that we have harshly judged China for the fact that the virus for COVID-19 most likely jumped from animals into humans, and we look at them with disdain for the names and types of animals that are listed. Yet, we have our own relationships with animals right here in KwaZulu-Natal, granted many of these would be domestic, and some wild animals, but relationships with animals nevertheless. Do we not talk about Cow's disease, Bird Flu etc.? Let's pause for a moment and think about this matter, and consider the fact that we are continually exposed to organisms that affect these animals. If we do this, we'd very likely begin to understand how we are also connected to, not only people in other parts of the world, or those in different economic and social classes, but also different sorts of animals that are exposed to different forms of organisms. I am not saying this to cause alarm, but simply to raise awareness, and begin to trigger a process of ensuring our safety as humans and the safety of the animals around us, with a forward-looking mindset.



# HOW KZN SHAPED UP TO THE CHALLENGE OF COVID-19

## FIRST HOSPITALS ASSIGNED

Before the first case of COVID-19 even emerged in the province, it was promptly decided that **Grey's Hospital** would be the first treatment facility for COVID-19 since the facility had previous experience with Ebola patients. Patient

Zero was admitted in this hospital.

Thereafter, **Addington, Ngwelezane** and **Manguzi Hospital** were added to the list. **Richmond Hospital** was one of the hospitals that were repurposed during the initial surge of the pandemic. Within just months, the hospital was converted from a TB facility into a state-of-

the-art COVID-19 hospital with a total of 95 beds for quarantine and isolation. **Doris Goodwin Hospital** is a specialized MDR-TB hospital with 100 beds situated in Pietermaritzburg that was also identified as one of the early quarantine sites. Among other hospitals which were repurposed for COVID-19 were; **Wentworth Hospital, Dundee** and **Niemeyer Hospital**.

## RENOVATED HOSPITALS

In June 2020 renovations at **Clairwood Hospital** were completed after the facility was refurbished in just two months with 154 isolation beds and about 40 quarantine beds. It also had technological advancements such as doors programmed

to only permit entry for people wearing a mask and with an appropriate temperature; as well as a wash bay to sanitise ambulances immediately after dropping off COVID-19 patients.

Over time, almost all hospitals, including Community Health Centres (CHCs), eventually had COVID-19 wards. At the time of publishing this

magazine, the Department had never run out of beds. When facilities had reached their capacity for COVID-19, patients were simply moved to other facilities within the Department. The brand-new **Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme Memorial Hospital** and the **King Dinuzulu Hospital Complex** were also on standby in the case that more beds would be needed. The need has not arisen.





## FIELD HOSPITALS

In preparation for the positive COVID-19 cases that were expected to rise in the province, temporary field hospitals were placed in strategic areas of KwaZulu-Natal.

These are just some of the stations:

**The Royal Showgrounds,** Umgungundlovu District.

**The Amatikulu Training Centre,** King Cetshwayo District

**Coastlands Hotel,** eThekweni District

**Chaka's Rock Chalets,** iLembe District

Private accommodation in hotels, B&Bs and resorts was also procured as quarantine sites in various areas across the province.



## HUMAN RESOURCES

Initially MEC Nomagugu Simelane appealed to the Premier's Office to fund the employment of nearly 5 000 health employees for six months to aid in the battle against the pandemic. However, a year later about 10 000 employees have had their contracts

extended for another six months. The Premier noted, "The appointment of the contract staff has assisted in alleviating the pressure and burnout of staff, who have borne the brunt of Covid-19. Their presence has improved turnaround times in the attendance and treatment of patients, as well as led

to the reduction in patient waiting times, among other critical performance areas."

In May 2020 MEC Nomagugu Simelane also welcomed a group of Cuban doctors who were deployed to the province to fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS

From the beginning of March 2020, MEC Nomagugu Simelane and HOD Dr Sandile Tshabalala began to engage with different stakeholders to address their concerns and discuss plans to protect citizens. These included the South African Taxi Association, traditional healers and leaders, religious organizations, the media and unions.





## PRIVATE PARTNER DONATIONS

Many private partners gathered together with the Department in the fight against COVID-19. These are some highlights:

### The Covenant Fellowship Church International (CFCI)

In April 2020 the Covenant Fellowship Church International (CFCI) boosted the fight against the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) through the donation of 20 000 surgical masks.



### Mondi

In June 2020 Mondri, a leading global packaging and paper group, donated 100,000 FFP3/N95 medical grade masks to protect frontline healthcare workers in KwaZulu-Natal from Covid-19.

These higher grade medical masks, which were much sought after particularly during the first wave, were donated to The Solidarity Fund for delivery to the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health and cost just under R10 million.



### Transnat Coachlines

In May 2020 Newcastle-based bus company Transnat Coachlines donated three mobile clinics (two

buses and a one-ton truck) to assist the Department of Health for two months with screening and testing for COVID 19 in the province



### Transnet

In May 2020 Transnet launched the Transnet-Phelophepha healthcare train clinic in Phoenix, north of Durban.

### Toyota

In August 2020 Toyota donated a multi-million-rand package geared towards supporting the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Health as well as the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. The almost R15 million package included COVID-19 testing equipment, hospital facility support,

10 Hilux bakkies for contact tracing as well as 50 000 face shields in the region.

The Department thanks all organisations, mentioned and unmentioned, who rolled up their sleeves to stand side to side in the fight against COVID-19. Indeed, together, we can do more.





# THE COVID-19 VACCINE DEMYSTIFIED

Vaccination is a simple, safe, and effective way of protecting people against harmful diseases

### What is a vaccine?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), vaccination is a simple, safe, and effective way of protecting people against harmful diseases, before they come into contact with them. It uses your body's natural defences to build resistance to specific infections and makes your immune system stronger.

Vaccines train your immune system to create antibodies, just as it does when it's exposed to a disease. However, because vaccines contain only killed or weakened forms of germs like viruses or bacteria, they do not cause the disease or put you at risk of its complications.

Most vaccines are given by an injection, but some are given orally (by mouth) or sprayed into the nose.

### Has the COVID-19 vaccine been tested?

**Yes.**

The most commonly used vaccines have been around for decades, with millions of people receiving them safely every year. As with all medicines, every vaccine must go through extensive and rigorous testing to ensure it is safe before it can be introduced in a country, (WHO).

An experimental vaccine is first tested in animals to evaluate its safety and potential to prevent disease. It is then tested in human clinical trials.

Before a vaccine can be distributed, the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) must assess the safety, efficacy and quality of the vaccine.

SAHPRA has committed to the expeditious evaluation of these vaccines through various mechanisms that will shorten the timeframe it usually takes to approve a product. The Oxford

University-AstraZeneca vaccine has already been approved by various regulators around the world and is being distributed in other countries (NICD 2020).

Less than 24 hours after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine arrived in South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize, his deputy Joe Phaahla and healthcare workers were among the first group of people to receive the vaccine at Khayelitsha District Hospital in the Western Cape on February 17.

"The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been shown in extensive trials to be safe and efficacious and will protect our healthcare workers from illness and death from Covid-19," said President Cyril Ramaphosa.

"To demonstrate our confidence in this vaccine and help allay any fears that people may have, the Minister of Health and I will join the first healthcare workers to receive the vaccine in Khayelitsha."





# KWAZULU-NATAL HEALTHCARE WORKERS' COVID-19 VACCINE DELIGHT

Many healthcare workers have followed suit by getting the COVID-19 vaccine. Here are some anecdotes from those who have taken the jab.

The day of the first vaccination for KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) healthcare workers was on the 18th of February 2021, at the Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital in the township of Umlazi in Durban this year. The vaccination launch and rollout process was overseen by the KZN Premier Sihle Zikalala, KZN Health MEC Nomagugu Simelane, and HOD for Health Dr Sandile Tshabalala, along with the hospital CEO Mr Gabriel Bigboy Khawula.

Although some healthcare workers may still be undecided on whether or not to take the COVID-19 vaccine, many have revealed that they are now working with a sigh of relief since they have received a dose of the vaccine.



**Dr Kasthurba Maharaj (45 years-old)** who resides in Amanzimtoti, south of Durban, was the first Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital healthcare worker who received the COVID-19 vaccine in KZN on the day of its official rollout in the province.

Dr Maharaj said for her it was beyond a normal experience as she felt extremely honoured and special about being the first to receive the vaccine at the hospital, which is extremely close to her heart.

"The vaccination process itself was easy and simple to follow. The job given to me by Dr Aung was expertly done with no pain at all during the process. Prince Mshiyeni and Umlazi itself, truly needed this positive show of faith from the powers that be, and I am extremely grateful."

Ms Maharaj said she literally prayed every day for a viable vaccine ever since the start of the pandemic and through both the first and the harrowing second wave.

"COVID-19 is a heartless, cruel, and ruthless killer. It

doesn't discriminate and it is unpredictable. It has robbed us all of friends, family, neighbours, colleagues and loved ones. It has separated us from each other, and changed our school and social life."

Maharaj said, "Thus far we've been battling this brutal enemy with not much weapons in our armoury. The vaccine now adds a big gun to our arsenal".

She said those who haven't taken the vaccine must not be scared, COVID-19 is even scarier as the vaccine will help achieve herd immunity to keep the most vulnerable healthy, and it will help prevent severe disease and death.

"I had a slight pain at the injection site, the next day. Other than that, I had no other side effects."



**Sbongiseni Ndlovu (41 years-old)** from Eshowe in KZN and a porter at the Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital said being one of the first to receive the vaccine was exciting but normal like any other vaccine.

"People should not listen to false news that the vaccine is dangerous as this is for their own benefit. It will boost immunity against the virus especially since it's said the third is coming. They must have the vaccine, there is nothing to be scared of," said Ndlovu.

Ndlovu said he only encountered little pain and a mild headache that lasted for only one day as side effects.



**Thandeka Edna Gcwabaza (39 years-old)** from Adams Mission, south of Durban is also a healthcare worker as a staff nurse at the Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital, who received the COVID-19 vaccine jab the following day after its launch.

She said after taking the vaccine, she had mild tiredness the next day, and then she was fine, with only a slight pain upon touching her vaccinated site.

"Yes, I am relieved now that I have taken the vaccine and I am stressing less about COVID-19 and I have been an encouragement to my close family and colleagues," said Gcwabaza.



**Sarisha Singh**, a physiotherapist from Mount Edgecombe who has been working at Prince Mshiyeni for 17 years shared her excitement about health care workers getting vaccinated, saying her experience was bittersweet. She was grateful that she was no longer defenceless against the virus but also had feelings of anxiety rush through her body as there was a possibility of getting side effects.

Singh encountered several side effects from the vaccine such as headaches, chills, fatigue and body pains. After two days she says she woke up feeling rejuvenated and her energy levels were back to normal. She encourages people to still get vaccinated despite the chances of experiencing side effects, as these outweigh the potential benefit of the vaccine.

"Please don't be discouraged by potential side effects. Knowledge is power, knowing that you can experience side effects and what some of them are, would enable symptomatic treatment," said Singh.



COMPILED BY:

**CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS**  
(KZN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH)

**TEL:** 033 395 2547

or 033 395 2653

**FAX:** 033 342 9477

**Web:** [www.kznhealth.gov.za](http://www.kznhealth.gov.za)