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**TO:
HEADS OF PROVINCIAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS
HEADS OF PHARMACEUTICAL SERVICES
DISTRICT AND PHC MANAGERS
COVID-19 VACCINE PROGRAMME MANAGERS
COVID-19 VACCINATION SITE MANAGERS
COVID-19 VACCINATORS**

**SUBJECT: CHANGES TO VACCINE ROLL-OUT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND
VACCINATION SCHEDULES: 15th OCTOBER 2021**

1. The roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines in South Africa has to date targeted those 18 years and older using a standard vaccination schedule (one dose of the Janssen® (J&J) vaccine or two doses of Comirnaty® (Pfizer) vaccine).
2. This circular outlines changes to the eligibility criteria for vaccination, and some exceptional circumstances which require adaptations to the standard vaccine schedule.
3. Although all eligible persons are strongly encouraged to vaccinate, older persons (those 50 years and older) should continue to be prioritised for vaccination.

Vaccination of children 12 to 17 years of age

4. From **20th October 2021, all children 12 years and older will be eligible** to receive **one dose of Comirnaty® (Pfizer) vaccine**. (Further information regarding possible provision and timing of a second dose will be forthcoming).
5. The single dose of Comirnaty® (Pfizer) vaccine will be provided at public and private National Vaccination Programme sites only. We are not encouraging any vaccinations to take place at schools as part of school health programme. This will be reviewed during 2022.
6. It should be noted that the **Children's Act 38 of 2005 (as amended by Act 41 of 2007) allows children 12 years and older to consent** to medical treatment including vaccination.
 - 6.1. Any child 12 years and older who understands the risks and benefits of vaccination can consent to be vaccinated. Any such child who requests

vaccination, should be vaccinated, even if not accompanied by a parent or other adult

- 6.2. It is however recommended that young adolescents are accompanied by a parent or other adult when they present for vaccination, and provision must be made by vaccination sites for an adult to accompany a child during the vaccination process.
7. Clinical trials of mRNA vaccines in children 12 to 17-year-old recipients have demonstrated a favourable safety profile. Whilst cases of self-limited myocarditis have been described, the risk-benefit assessment for COVID-19 vaccination shows a favourable balance. (The vaccine consent form has been updated to indicate this potential complication).
8. Whilst all children 12 years and older should be encouraged to vaccinate, particular attention should be paid to ensuring that children who have specific conditions that result in them being immunocompromised, and which place them at high risk of severe COVID-19 infection, are vaccinated.
9. As with adults, a child should provide their South African ID number (available on the ID document or the Birth Certificate), foreign passport number or asylum/refugee number for purposes of registering on the EVDS. Most children will provide a birth certificate which includes an ID number as proof of identify when presenting for vaccination. As previously communicated such birth certificates, as well as South African ID books or cards, foreign passports or asylum/refugee papers should be recognised as proof of identity.

Vaccination of pregnant and lactating women

10. A circular recommending that all pregnant and lactating women should be offered vaccination (irrespective of duration of gestation) was issued on 29th August 2021.
11. Reports of health care workers advising pregnant and lactating women not to vaccinate continue to be received. For this reason, the current recommendations are repeated here, and all health care workers are strongly encouraged to follow them.
12. Current recommendations are as follows:
 - 12.1 COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to women who are eligible to be vaccinated during any stage of pregnancy, and during lactation. As previously recommended, both the Comirnaty® (Pfizer) vaccine or the Janssen® (J&J) vaccine can be offered. Everyone **12 years and older** is now eligible to be vaccinated, and women and girls **12 years and older** should therefore be offered vaccination during any stage of pregnancy, and during breastfeeding.
 - 12.2 Consideration should be given to providing vaccination to pregnant and breastfeeding women during routine antenatal and postnatal visits. Where this is not possible, health care workers should encourage pregnant and breastfeeding women to access vaccination at a nearby vaccination site.

- 12.3 Health care workers are encouraged to discuss the benefits and possible risks of COVID-19 vaccination with their patients. These discussions should include the increased risk, albeit small, of severe disease in pregnant women when compared to non-pregnant women, reassurance about the growing evidence supporting the safety of vaccines in pregnant and breastfeeding women, the strong immune response following vaccination and the benefits of immune transfer to the baby, and ongoing safety monitoring of vaccine use in pregnancy. Furthermore, there are no known risks associated with other non-live vaccines given routinely to pregnant women.
- 12.4 COVID-19 vaccination is strongly encouraged for non-pregnant women contemplating pregnancy.

Vaccination of immunocompromised adults

13. Individuals with a compromised immune system are not only vulnerable to COVID-19, but also may have a reduced immune response to COVID-19 vaccines. Such individuals include those taking long-term oral steroid therapy or systemic biologics for autoimmune conditions, have haematological and immune malignancies, receive solid organ and bone marrow transplants, be on renal dialysis, or have a primary immunodeficiency disorder (PID).
14. These individuals require an **additional dose as part of the primary schedule** of a COVID-19 vaccine to enhance immune protection and prevent the emergence of new variants. It should be noted that these doses form part of the individual's **primary vaccination schedule** and are not considered booster doses.
15. Such doses should only be administered to individuals 18 years and older **at least 28 days after receiving the previous dose**. (Note: this recommendation does not apply to children and adolescents).
16. Individuals must receive the **same vaccine that they received initially**, e.g. those who received two doses of Comirnaty® (Pfizer) vaccine should receive a third dose of Comirnaty® vaccine, whilst those who received one dose of the Janssen® (J&J) vaccine should receive a second dose of the Janssen® vaccine.
17. Implementation of this recommendation requires changes to the Electronic Vaccine Data System (EVDS) and establishment of systems to authorize, administer and record such doses. Additional doses can be requested by the attending clinicians only and further standard operating procedures will be provided to this effect. **The anticipated implementation date for provision of the additional doses is 30th November 2021.**



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ACTING DIRECTOR-GENERAL: HEALTH
DATE: 19 October 2021