

EC primed for big jab rollout to teachers

Health and education in partnership and ‘ready to roll’ at 67 sites, mainly halls and schools

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The Eastern Cape health department is ready to roll with the vaccination of thousands of teachers across the province from more than 5,000 schools.

The rollout is expected to start on Wednesday.

Basic education minister Angie Motshekga announced at the weekend that teachers would get their jabs from June 23.

On Sunday, health spokesperson Sizwe Kupelo confirmed they were expecting the first batch of Johnson & Johnson vaccine from abroad on Monday and Tuesday.

He said the whole “education family” including security guards, clerks and temporary teachers would receive the jab.

But they would not be required to register.

“They will have to present Persal [staff database] numbers and their IDs. A confirmation letter from the principal will be accepted for those who do not have Persal numbers.”

He said 67 sites had been identified across the province; with 90% being school and municipal halls. “The responsibility of education is to ensure proper sanitation in those sites and that computer equipment is available.”

They hope to have finished by July 8, Kupelo said. “We are also going to do the private education sector. However, their security guards must go on the registration system because they are not on Persal.

“We should be starting on Wednesday in all those 67 sites. The transport of teachers to the site is education’s job.”

Kupelo said the vaccination of teachers would not affect the rollout for the elderly as theirs was the Pfizer vaccine.

“The rollout for the elderly is going well. We started on May 17 with 19 sites and we increased that to 83 public sites and 15 private sites. There is more focus on rural areas.

“We are intensifying the registration programme for the rural elderly. We are using more than 3,000 community health-care workers and we also have personnel under the expanded public works programme to assist in fast-tracking the registration. We will continue to take walk-ins at all the sites.

“There are minor complaints over the walk-ins but those were immediately resolved.

“With health workers who received J&J earlier, we have five health workers who were infected with the virus but none of them were severely ill.

“We appeal to young ones to register their grandparents. They do not have to be in the villages to register them.”

The spokesperson said they had outreach teams that would go to villages, analysing data of people who are frail.

Vaccination for the elderly had reached 200,000 while 500,000 had registered.

“We have demonstrated efficiency when it comes to rolling out the vaccine.”

Kupelo said the third wave had not yet reached the province. “The premier was deliberately misunderstood by some who wanted to distort our message.”

He said Nelson Mandela Bay was a hotspot, followed by Sarah Baartman district and Buffalo City Metro.

The province had 2,802 active cases and 251 hospital admissions on Sunday.

Kupelo said: “We remain concerned about the level of complacency in terms of wearing masks. We are gravely concerned about super-spreader events such as the recent strikes in Makhanda and Nelson Mandela Bay.

“We have installed big medical oxygen tanks for rural hospitals such as St Barnabas, Nompumelelo, Aliwal North so unlike the first and second phases, people may not die now due to lack of oxygen as long as they get to hospital early. For isolation we have acquired machines that detect if your oxygen levels are low.

“What killed almost 40% of those people with comorbidities and in the over-50 age bracket in the first and second waves was the lack of oxygen.

“The total number of beds set aside for the third wave is over 2,000 and out of that, we have 260 oxygen beds for those who are severely ill.

“Simultaneously we are trying to cover the 700,000 estimated elderly in the EC so that we minimise the number of those who would want to be hospitalised.”

Education sector unions welcomed the sector’s jab.

Naptosa chief executive Loyiso Mbinda said they supported the vaccination, especially as it did not have an age restriction.

“We are in support of the vaccination. It means that it will stabilise the sector immediately,” Mbinda said.

PSA acting provincial manager Thami Makuzeni encouraged all workers to get vaccinated, but added: “It should be taken with caution.

“Those who do not want it should not be forced to take it,” she said.

“It is a good thing if they are willing to take it.”