

South Africa's COVID-19 vaccine rollout plan

by Anthea Towert, CFP® | Tennant Life Benefits



“This is the largest and most complex logistical undertaking in our country’s history. It will require the active involvement of all spheres of government, all sectors of society and all citizens and residents of our country.”

President Cyril Ramaphosa, 11 January 2021

South Africa’s much-anticipated COVID-19 vaccination plan was recently presented to parliament by Health Minister Dr. Zweli Mkhize.

A key objective of the roll out plan is to achieve herd or population immunity and prevent ongoing transmission of the virus. To attain this, **67% to 70% of South Africa’s population needs to develop immunity** against the virus and break the cycle of transmission.

Guiding principles

The vaccination plan sees **the South African government being the sole purchaser of vaccines** for the country. The National Department of Health (NDOH) will contract with suppliers to purchase stock and allocate to provincial health departments and the private health sector.

With limited availability of vaccines, it will be necessary for the government to procure available stock from various manufacturers. This means there are likely to be **multiple vaccines in the programme that are NOT interchangeable in a two-dose vaccine schedule.**

The vaccination plan will be rolled out in a phased approach, based on pre-vaccination registration and an appointment system for vaccination. All vaccinated persons will be recorded on a national register and issued with a vaccination card. A national rollout committee will oversee the rollout, across both the public and private sectors.

Private sector co-ordination

A private health coordinating forum will be set up, comprising role players in the private hospital, independent practitioner, retail pharmacy and private health funding space, to facilitate the following:

- Co-ordinate the vaccination of private health sector workers
- Provide the platform for vaccination of health worker communities including GPs and retail pharmacies
- Facilitate a funding agreement with government for medical schemes to pay for vaccines for their members and help subsidise non-members

Role of medical schemes

Medical schemes are in a healthy financial position overall and can comfortably afford to pay for the vaccine for their members. With the COVID-19 vaccine and its associated costs now added to the prescribed minimum benefits (PMBs) list, schemes are obliged to cover the full cost estimated at between R0.9 billion and R2.3 billion.

Also, under a proposed agreement with the government to help subsidise the cost for non-members, **medical schemes are likely to fund the cost of vaccines for around 30% of the country’s adult population**, including their own members, at a total cost of around R7 billion.

Other private sector, business and labour co-ordination initiatives will include:

- Pooling of funds to support the vaccination programme through the Solidarity Fund
- Promoting the use of vaccination amongst employees and workers
- Provision of a vaccination platform through occupational health clinics

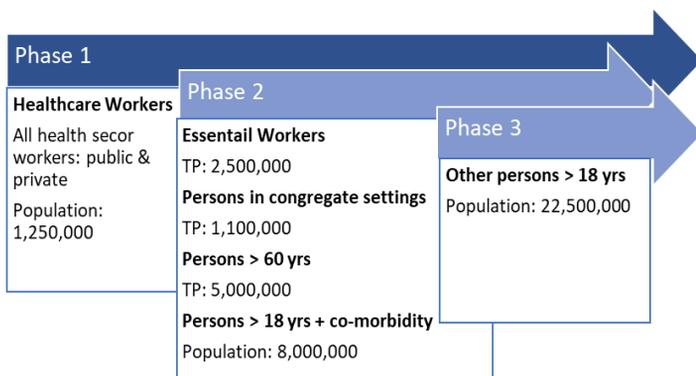


Phased approach and prioritised people

Vaccines will not be available to everyone immediately, and a prioritization system will be applied.

Priority groups have been identified and include front line healthcare workers, essential services workers, those most at risk of infection and serious outcomes and those most at risk of transmitting the virus to others.

The table below illustrates the government's phased approach based on the availability of vaccines:



Outstanding issues include whether pregnant woman and children under 18 years should be vaccinated, and people known to have been infected and have recovered. Best practice in these areas is unclear and guidance is being sought from the WHO.

Resources and delivery

The government estimates that **40 million people will need to be vaccinated with two doses over a 12-month period** – a very ambitious target indeed! This equates to as many as 316,000 vaccinations per day. Based on government's assumption that each vaccinator can vaccinate 50 people per day, this means 6,300 full-time vaccinators will be needed.

Alongside public and private hospitals, the roll-out plan envisages using retail group and independent pharmacies, GP practices, occupational health clinics and mobile clinics to ensure that South Africans receive both doses of a vaccine.

Distribution security also needs high priority focus in the wake of the recent PPE corruption scandal.

Budgeted cost

Government has published its budget estimations for the vaccination of the population, with an initial target of **R20.6 billion for 67% herd immunity cover** rolled out by the end of 2021. For 100% coverage of the population, the budget is estimated at around R30 billion.

Billions 2020/21 ZAR

Population	10%	30%	50%	67%	100%
Total Budget	2.4	9.0	15.6	20.6	30.0

Government's pricing assumptions are based on a basket of vaccine options and include:

- 5% Moderna @ R536 per dose
- 5% Pfizer @ R299 per dose
- 70% AstraZeneca @ R54 per dose
- 20% Johnson & Johnson @ R153 per dose

Pricing excludes supply chain costs, a Solidarity Fund donation and recoupment of costs from medical schemes.

Concluding comments

Until recently South Africa had only committed to being part of the Covax arrangement for vaccine supply, for 10% of the population with delivery mid-2021. It is clear that this facility alone cannot meet the vaccine targets government has set. Bilateral agreements with other vaccine manufacturers are urgently needed to secure additional supply.

Considering these complex challenges, it is unrealistic to expect the vaccine programme to take us back into normalcy anytime soon. Continued compliance and vigilance with safety protocols is vital.

Ultimately the success of South Africa's Covid-19 vaccination programme will indeed depend on the active, transparent and collective effort of all of us.

Sources: National Department of Health | COVID-19 Vaccine rollout plan | 07 January 2021
Daily Maverick | Towards herd immunity from COVID-19: Costing a vaccine strategy for South Africa | 07 January 2021
Moneyweb | Medical aids prepare for Covid vaccine rollout | 11 January 2021

Contacts: info@tennant.co.za | FSP License No. 43648 | CMS Org No. 3837



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