

Call by SAMA: Give vaccine booster shot to all healthcare workers

A call that vaccine booster shots should be available to healthcare workers - including doctors - immediately has been made by the South African Medical Association (SAMA).



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“We believe the scientific evidence strongly favours this approach,” notes Dr Angelique Coetzee, chairperson of SAMA.

The Association says research indicates that the immunity and efficacy of single dose vaccination, such as the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, is unknown and that a single J&J vaccination only provides good immunity up to, at most, eight months.

“It’s critical, in our view, that booster shots be administered to all doctors and healthcare workers as a matter of routine, and as early as is needed,” says Coetzee.

“Resources, both human and operational, are already stretched and the battles against Covid – especially during the first three waves – have exacted a further heavy toll.

“Doctors are emotionally strained, and we are still receiving information on burnout among many of our colleagues.

“Booster doses will go a long way to send a message to doctors that they are being supported, and that their efforts are

being recognised,” notes Coetzee.

Vaccines in good supply

In light of the fact that vaccines are in good supply, and that providing booster shots will not dent supply to those who need their first shots, Coetzee says it's now time to start prioritising the roll-out of boosters to all healthcare workers.

“We still need to focus on getting as many South Africans vaccinated as possible and we will support those efforts.

“But vaccine supply is not constrained and some of those which are available must be given to the people who face this pandemic head-on every day without diverting anything from the public, she stresses.

Coetzee says the high effectiveness of reducing hospitalisations among those who have received second doses and booster shots will ensure the continued health of healthcare workers and reduce transmissions in health facilities.

On the frontline

“These are people who are literally on the frontline of a war, and who have made enormous sacrifices to assist others.

It's our duty, and the duty of authorities, to ensure these brave men and women receive the best possible protection they can, which is possible through authorizing booster shots,” says Coetzee.

She says that government should give healthcare workers the individual right to choose between the second dose of J&J or Pfizer.

In addition, she says, booster shots will become more necessary as new variants of Covid-19 arise.

Coetzee says the administration of booster doses to healthcare workers must not detract from intensive efforts to ensure all healthcare workers who have not yet received their initial doses get these done as a matter of urgency.

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