

J&J makes demands before releasing SA vaccines

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) has demanded a letter from the Department of Trade and Industry acknowledging its local investment in local manufacturer, Aspen Pharmacare before it will sign off the delivery of 20-million doses of the vaccine to South Africa. This is one of difficult and sometimes unreasonable terms the government has had to navigate in procuring vaccines, health minister, Dr Zweli Mkhize told the Parliamentary Health Portfolio Committee.



Image: Johnson & Johnson

“We’ve been taken aback by this, as there are clauses in the agreement that express this support and acknowledge that this production will not just be limited to South Africa and the continent, but also targeted for the global market,” he said.

Last month, President Cyril Ramaphosa and his deputy, David Mabuza, visited the Aspen Pharmacare sterile manufacturing facility, where millions of vaccine shots are produced in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape.

“Our support for this production in our country was publicly made... J&J said if we don’t give them this letter, we’re making their global leadership nervous and to them, we’ve not shown our political will to support them,” said Mkhize.

In addition, the agreements with Pfizer and Johnson J&J agreements, which both cost \$10 per vaccine, state that down payments been made in advance by the department shall not be refundable by the manufacturer to us in any circumstances. “This is another onerous term that we had to settle for,” the minister told the committee.

On a more positive note, Mkhize said the country has secured an additional 10-million Pfizer vaccines, bringing the total number of the two-dose vaccine to 30 million. The first batch of over 300,000 vials of these shots are expected to arrive in the country on 3 May 2021, while the rest of the consignment will be delivered weekly.

J&J vaccine suspended

Meanwhile, Mkhize was confident that in an unlikely event that the J&J rollout is completely halted, the country would still be able to proceed with phase two of the vaccination programme.



SA temporarily suspends J&J jab

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“We are confident that the rollout of Johnson & Johnson will resume and so, with 30-million doses of Johnson & Johnson and 30-million doses of Pfizer secured, we now have enough doses to exceed the 40-million we were targeting this year,” he said.

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