

TALKING POINTS ON COVID-19 AND COVID-19 VACCINATION EXERCISE.

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Department of Health Promotion, Education and Communication

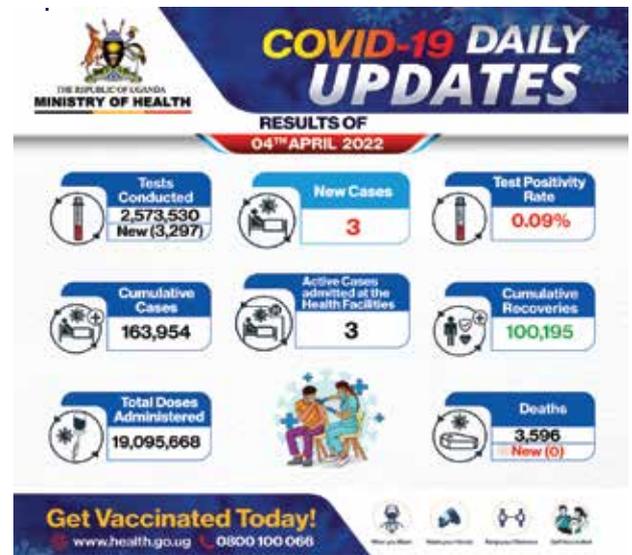
Preamble on COVID-19.

- ▶ In 2020, Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) ravaged the whole world Uganda inclusive. All sectors of society and the economy were affected by COVID-19.
- ▶ COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. The World Health Organization (WHO) first learned of this new virus from cases in Wuhan city in China on 31st December 2019.
- ▶ In Uganda the first case of COVID-19 was detected on 21st March 2020 with the Government instituting travel restrictions as early as 18th March 2020 as strong measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- ▶ The virus can spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles (droplets) when they cough, sneeze, talk, sing or breathe heavily. The main way the virus spreads is when people are in direct or close contact (less than 2 meters) with an infected person.
- ▶ Persons with COVID-19 have some of the following symptoms: Fever, constantly High Temperature beyond 38.5 degrees Celsius, Cough, Chest pain, Difficulty in Breathing, General body weakness, Loss of Appetite, Taste, Smell and Red Eyes.
- ▶ The whole world has resorted to vaccination as a reliable means of offering protection against severe COVID-19. In Uganda vaccination against COVID-19 started on 10th March 2021 targeting health workers, teachers, security forces, persons above 18 years with underlying illnesses and the elderly persons aged 50 years and above. Currently vaccination is now open to all persons aged 18 years and above. However, plans are under way to vaccinate those below 18 years in the near future.
- ▶ In the beginning the COVID-19 vaccination services were offered at static health facilities (HC III and above) but as vaccines became available, the mode of deployment changed to regional accelerated mass vaccination campaigns targeting all those aged 18 years and above. In this approach, vaccination was taken closer to the people by using schools, places of worship, markets, community halls and open grounds as service points including health facilities.

QUESTION: What is the situation of COVID-19 in Uganda today?

RESPONSE: Before the Talk show, please gather some statistics that paint the picture of the day and expound as per example shown below. Daily statistics are always available on the MoH website and her social media platforms like Twitter.

Cumulative Positive cases	
New Positive Cases	
Positivity Rate	
Cumulative Deaths	
Deaths for that Day	
Patients under hospitalization	
Total Number Vaccinated	
Number Vaccinated as per Priority Groups (if you can access it)	



- ▶ Although everyone is at risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19, people who are 50 years and above and those with underlying medical problems like diabetes, hypertension, heart, kidney, liver disease are at higher risk of becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19.
- ▶ Uganda has had 3 waves of the epidemic where the 2nd wave was DEADLIER and worse than the 1st wave. The 2nd wave stretched the health system because of the big number of patients who were in dire need for the few beds available in the Intensive Care Units (ICU) and the High Dependence Units (HDU) around the different hospitals. This plunged the country into a 42 days lock down meant to halt transmission.
- ▶ There have been new and deadly variants of concern (VOCs) from India, South Africa, Nigeria and the United Kingdom among others. The Delta variant was responsible for the deaths in the 2nd wave while Omicron was responsible for the 3rd wave which was characterized by mild disease with some deaths especially among the elderly, non- vaccinated and those with comorbidities.
- ▶ All these with standing, the available vaccines are effective in preventing /managing these new COVID-19 variants.

Prevention is by observing the SOPs to the dot, and these include:

- Always wear your face mask properly covering your nose and mouth while in public.
- Maintain a distance of at least 2 meters (6 feet) between yourself and another person.
- Regularly wash your hands with soap and running water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid public gatherings and crowds.
- Avoid hand shaking and hugging
- Above all, get vaccinated with all recommended doses including boosters if you qualify

QUESTION: Why is the COVID-19 Vaccination program very important?

RESPONSE: • With the big numbers of confirmed cases and deaths worldwide, it became increasingly important for scientists to find a solution to control and end the COVID-19 pandemic.

• As a result, multiple COVID-19 vaccines have been developed. Since last year, the World Health Organization has been working in collaboration with scientists, businesses, pharmaceutical companies and global health organizations to speed up the development and approval of COVID-19 vaccines.

• Hence, the main purpose of all the COVID-19 vaccines is to prevent severe disease, hospitalization and death. There is need to get many people vaccinated to attain 'herd immunity' so as to eventually to contain the pandemic.

QUESTION: What is a COVID-19 vaccine?

RESPONSE: A COVID-19 vaccine is intended to provide acquired immunity against severe disease caused by SARS CoV 2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

QUESTION: How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

RESPONSE: COVID-19 vaccines are all designed to teach the body's immune system to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccine gives the body a message on how to produce a response that will recognize the coronavirus if it attacks. This way, the vaccine is able to protect the person.

QUESTION: What are the different COVID-19 vaccines available?

RESPONSE: There are several vaccines that have undergone clinical trials to determine their effectiveness and safety for human use. The vaccines that have so far been approved for use by WHO under Emergency Use Listing (EUL) are 10 as of December 2021. However, Uganda is only deploying the following vaccine brands:

- AstraZeneca
- Pfizer
- Moderna Vaccine
- Sinopharm Vaccine
- Johnson and Johnson Vaccine/ Janssen Vaccine
- Sinovac-CoronaVac vaccine

QUESTION: Who will be vaccinated against COVID-19?

RESPONSE: Every person above 18 years old will be vaccinated against COVID-19. In addition, plans are under way to vaccinate persons aged 12 – 17 years of age who are in and out of school. Later on, we will vaccinate those aged 5- 11 years old. Note, these children will need the consent of their parents or guardians. The approved and available vaccine brand for this age group is the Pfizer and Moderna vaccine.

Previously, COVID-19 vaccination had focused on those populations who were deemed to be most at risk of suffering from severe COVID-19 and death. These were: Health Care workers in public and private facilities; Teaching and non-teaching staff; Security personnel; people above 50 years; and people aged 18 to 50 years with underlying illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, heart, kidney and liver diseases.

QUESTION: Will people have to pay for the vaccines?

RESPONSE: The Government of Uganda is providing the vaccines FREE of charge to all people who are eligible for vaccination. However, in an effort to increase vaccination coverage, the Ministry of Health has partnered with some Private Health Facilities to offer COVID-19 Vaccination Services to their clients. These facilities will charge a nominal fee meant to cover their operational costs.

QUESTION: How is the vaccine administered and how many doses of the vaccine will each person receive and the intervals?

RESPONSE: The vaccine is being administered via an injection into the left upper arm. It is important to note that each type of vaccine has its own schedule for one to be fully vaccinated. It is administered as follows:

AstraZeneca Vaccine:

Each individual must receive two doses given at 12 weeks apart.

Pfizer Vaccine:

Each individual must receive two doses given 4 weeks apart.

Moderna Vaccine:

Each individual must receive two doses given 4 weeks apart

Johnson & Johnson:

It is a single dose vaccine.

Sinopharm:

Each individual must receive two doses given 4 weeks apart

Sinovac:

Each individual must receive two doses given 4 weeks apart.

How some of the Covid-19 vaccines compare

Company	Type	Doses	Storage
 Oxford Uni-AstraZeneca	Viral vector (genetically modified virus)	x2 	 2 to 8°C (6 months)
 Moderna	RNA (part of virus genetic code)	x2 	 -25 to -15°C (7 months)
 Pfizer-BioNTech	RNA	x2 	 -80 to -60°C (6 months)
 Gamaleya (Sputnik V)	Viral vector	x2 	 -18.5°C (liquid form) 2 to 8°C (dry form)
 Sinovac (CoronaVac)	Inactivated virus (weakened virus)	x2 	 2 to 8°C
 Novavax	Protein-based	x2 	 2 to 8°C
 Janssen	Viral vector	x1 	 2 to 8°C (3 months)

Source: UK government, Reuters



QUESTION: How long should a person wait before they benefit from the protective effect of the vaccine?

RESPONSE: Studies show that one's immunity begins to strengthen fourteen (14) days after the first dose. When an individual takes the second dose, it strengthens his/ her immunity more 14 days after the second dose. It is therefore, important for all individuals to take their second dose at the right time and then follow the SOPs.

QUESTION: How do we know that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

RESPONSE: There are many strict measures in place to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are safe. All the vaccines that have been approved for use have gone through a rigorous and multistage process of development and evaluation and are safe for use.

QUESTION: How come the COVID-19 vaccines were developed within a short time?

RESPONSE: It is true that COVID-19 vaccines have been developed faster than any other vaccine in history. This was because it was a global emergency. Every sector in every country was affected.

- The technology that has been used in developing the COVID-19 vaccines has been tried and tested and has been under use or research for many years. The vaccines that are now being reviewed and approved by regulatory bodies have been through the same amount of testing and safety processes as other vaccines

- Please note that scientists prioritized COVID-19 vaccine development and ensured that vaccine safety was a top priority.

QUESTION: After one has been vaccinated, can he/she still catch COVID-19 or infect others?

RESPONSE: COVID-19 vaccines work by teaching your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. Your body will build antibodies that will protect you from getting sick with COVID-19. However, in the event that one gets COVID-19 after immunization, the disease will be mild and non-severe to cause ill health or death. This person can also infect others, hence, the need to continue to observe the COVID-19 prevention measures (SOPs). The recommended COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) include maintaining a physical distance of at least two meters, properly wearing face masks covering the nose and mouth, handwashing with soap and running water or using a hand sanitizer and avoiding crowds.

QUESTION: How long will one be protected after full vaccination?

RESPONSE: Studies have shown that the immune response to COVID-19 vaccines may wane (decrease in protection) over time. To this effect, Booster doses have been recommended to be administered to all those who are fully vaccinated 6 months after the single dose of J&J and 2nd dose for the other vaccine brands. This is now the safest and effective way to extend protection against variants of concern. The booster dose will be the same as the vaccine brand you received originally however, in case it is missing, you can be given another vaccine brand as per the guidelines. Mixing vaccines enhances the immune response when people need a booster dose when the vaccine brand they first received is not available.

Therefore, a booster vaccine enhances antibody levels and gives you a higher immune response than what you achieved after the first two doses.

QUESTION: What is 'mix and match' of COVID-19 vaccines?

RESPONSE: Current guidance from the Ministry of Health is that some vaccine brands can be mixed and given for the second dose different from the one you had for the first dose when it is not available. This is called 'Mix and Match' and it is safe and effective when health workers follow the table the next page.

Guidance on **MIX & MATCH** SCHEDULE OF VACCINES

All health workers are advised to follow the Mix and Match schedule to ensure that eligible persons complete their primary vaccination series

	First Dose	Second Dose	Interval between doses
1.	AstraZeneca	Pfizer or Moderna	12 weeks or more following dose 1 of AstraZeneca
2.	Pfizer	AstraZeneca or Johnson and Johnson	4 weeks or more following dose 1 of Pfizer
3.	Moderna	AstraZeneca or Johnson and Johnson	4 weeks or more following dose 1 of Moderna
4.	Sinopharm	AstraZeneca or Pfizer or Moderna or Johnson and Johnson	4 weeks or more following dose 1 of Sinopharm
5.	Sinovac	AstraZeneca or Pfizer or Moderna or Johnson and Johnson	4 weeks or more following dose 1 of Sinovac
6.	Johnson and Johnson	Booster dose – Pfizer/- Moderna	6 months after the first dose of Johnson and Johnson

QUESTION: Will a COVID-19 vaccine alter my DNA?

RESPONSE: No. COVID-19 vaccines do not change or interact with your DNA in anyway. COVID-19 vaccines teach our body cells how to make protein that triggers an immune response and helps us fight COVID-19.

QUESTION: Can COVID-19 vaccines transmit the coronavirus?

RESPONSE: No. All COVID-19 vaccines currently in use CANNOT transmit the Coronavirus. None of these vaccines is made from a LIVE Coronavirus that can replicate when it enters your body.

QUESTION: Does the COVID-19 vaccine have any side effects?

RESPONSE: Mild or minor side effects can occur. It is important to note that vaccines are generally safe and effective in protecting you against severe disease and death.

However, as with all medicines, side effects can occur after getting a vaccine. The known side effects are usually minor and do take a short while and go away. The known common ones are:

- Pain at injection site
- A sore arm
- A mild fever
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Fatigue

Please report all side effects to National Drug Authority via the following:

- Toll free line: 0800 101 999,
- SMS *284*99#
- WhatsApp: 0740 002 070
- <https://primaryreporting.who-umc.org/UG>

QUESTION: How do you manage these side effects?

RESPONSE: Use a warm compress to soothe redness and soreness at the injection site.

- You can take some paracetamol for the headaches, mild fever and body aches. Side effects usually improve within hours or up to 2 days after vaccination.
- Please contact your nearest health facility if side effects persist for longer than 2 days.
- More serious side effects are possible, but extremely rare.

QUESTION: Where will COVID-19 vaccination take place?

RESPONSE: COVID-19 Vaccination services are being offered at all public health facilities including National and Regional Referral Hospitals, General Hospitals, Health Center IVs, Health Center IIIs and other selected locations as determined by each individual district. The outreach vaccination sites include; places of worship, markets, schools, open play grounds and others which are closer to the people. These sites will be communicated to you periodically.

When coming for vaccination, please remember to carry your National ID or any other form of identification to enable the vaccination team capture your particulars for registration and follow up.

KEY TAKEAWAY MESSAGES

- All COVID-19 vaccines are FREE, SAFE & EFFECTIVE in preventing severe disease, hospitalization and death.
- All COVID-19 vaccines currently under deployment CANNOT TRANSMIT THE VIRUS THAT CAUSES COVID-19.
- COVID-19 is more dangerous to the elderly, people with underlying conditions and are not vaccinated. Protect these people in your family by supporting them to get vaccinated.
- As a concerned citizen, you are a role model in your society. Get vaccinated today and encourage others in the priority groups to get vaccinated.
- The COVID-19 vaccines have been through extensive, rigorous testing and safety processes like other vaccines. The COVID-19 vaccines are SAFE and EFFECTIVE and have been approved by the WHO and National Drug Authority.
- The COVID-19 Vaccines deployed in Uganda have a two-dose regimen apart from J&J which is a single dose. All are administered by intramuscular injection in the upper left arm.
- To get maximum protection against COVID-19, each individual must be FULLY IMMUNISED by completing the schedule as per recommendation of the different vaccine brands.
- You can now receive an alternative vaccine for the 2nd dose when the vaccine type for the 1st dose is not available. Mix and Match of COVID-19 vaccines is now recommended to bridge this gap.
- All those who have completed their primary series of vaccination must get a BOOSTER DOSE after 6 months of the last vaccination. You need the booster dose to offer you extra protection against the different emerging variants of COVID-19.

• For more details call the Ministry of Health toll free helpline on 0800-203033 / 0800-303033 or contact your District Health Office.



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