

**VACCINE ASSIST PROGRAMME**  
**BACKGROUND TO POSTER SET 3:**  
**ARE COVID-19 VACCINES SAFE? DO THEY WORK?**

**1. What must I know?**

- Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?
- Do COVID-19 vaccines work?
- How do the COVID-19 vaccines protect us?
- Can the COVID-19 vaccines protect us against the new virus variants?
- How long will we be protected after we are vaccinated?

**2. How will I explain it?**

- **Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?**

Yes! Millions of people around the world have already been safely vaccinated against COVID-19! All the vaccines had to pass strict medical tests to prove that they are safe, that they work, and that they are manufactured to a high quality.

Before the vaccines were allowed to be used in South Africa, they had to pass additional tests set by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA). Only vaccines with approval from SAHPRA are being used in our programme.

- **Do COVID-19 vaccines work?**

The vaccines approved for use in South Africa have been shown to be safe and effective. Large-scale clinical trials found that COVID-19 vaccination prevented most people from getting COVID-19.

The single-dose Johnson & Johnson, currently being administered in South Africa, has been found to be 74% effective against COVID-19 infection, and almost 100% effective against severe illness and death due to COVID-19.

The two-dose Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which is due to arrive in South Africa mid-2021, has been found to be 90% effective against COVID-19, and almost 100% against severe illness and death due to COVID-19.

- **How do the COVID-19 vaccines protect us?**

All COVID-19 vaccines work by creating an immune response to the SARS-Cov-2 virus. This immunity helps you fight the virus if exposed. This is why people who are vaccinated are protected from getting sick or severely ill with COVID-19.

Getting vaccinated may also protect people around you, because if you are protected from getting infected and from disease, you are less likely to infect someone else.

It typically takes about two weeks for the body to build protection after vaccination. That means it is possible you could still get COVID-19 soon after vaccination. This is because your body has not had enough time to build full protection.

- **Can the COVID-19 vaccines protect us against the new virus variants?**

Scientists expect the COVID-19 vaccines to provide at least some protection against new virus variants. This is because these vaccines create a broad immune response, so any virus mutations should not make vaccines completely ineffective. Even if you are exposed to a new variant, the vaccines are effective at preventing serious illness and death.

Scientists continue to study COVID-19 and all its variants, and if they find a variant which these vaccines cannot protect us from, they can change the vaccines to protect against these new variants.

While we are still learning about this virus, we need to do everything possible to stop its spread: not only to save lives, but also to prevent mutations that may reduce the efficacy of existing vaccines. This means wearing a mask, social distancing, and washing your hands regularly. Having the vaccination is an important part of stopping the spread of COVID-19.

- **How long will we be protected after we are vaccinated?**

Because COVID vaccines have only been developed in the past months, it's too early to know how long they will protect us from COVID-19. But researchers do know that protection from the vaccines lasts at least six months. As time goes by, they will learn more about how long our immunity lasts.

### 3. Summarise what has been learnt:

- The vaccines approved for use in South Africa have been shown to be safe and effective.
- Vaccination will protect most people from getting COVID-19.
- Vaccination will prevent the people who do still get infected with COVID-19 from falling seriously ill.
- The COVID-19 vaccine offers almost 100% protection against hospitalisation and death due to COVID-19.
- The COVID-19 vaccines work by creating an immune response to the COVID-19 virus. They teach your body to fight the virus without you having to fall ill.
- It takes about two weeks after your vaccination for your body to build up this protection.
- Scientists are confident that the vaccines will also offer some protection against the new variants of the virus.
- We know that vaccination will provide us with at least six month's immunity, but need to learn more about how long we will be protected for.
- While we are still learning about the virus, we need to do everything we can to stop it spreading. This means that as well as having the vaccine, we need to continue wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and washing our hands regularly.

### 4. Points to discuss with the group:

- Can you explain how vaccines work to protect us against illness?
- What are some of the things we need to do to stop the spread of COVID-19?

Sources:

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