**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH RECEIVES UPDATE FROM MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ON HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN RELATION TO COVID-19**

**Parliament, Thursday, 18  February 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Health received its seventh provincial update from the  Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Health on healthcare services in relation to Covid-19 and on the vaccine rollout strategy.

Briefing the committee, the Head of Department, Dr Savera Mohangi, said females account for 56% of the cases in the province. Overall, the majority of cases (26%) reported are  in the 30-39 age group.

The committee was informed that the first 80 000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccines were expected to arrive on the evening of Tuesday,16 February 2021, and would be dispatched to Mpumalanga Province on Wednesday,17 February 2021.

Outlining the vaccine rollout plan, Dr Mohangi said the province has identified two vaccination sites, Rob Ferreira and Witbank hospitals, due to limited stock. The two hospitals were chosen because of their high numbers of  healthcare workers who had been exposed to Covid-19. Mzansi Ethical Research Centre has been nominated to oversee the vaccination process in Mpumalanga.

Furthermore, she said the vaccination programme will have to be implemented in the two hospitals over a maximum of two weeks. A team of 42 vaccinators will rotate between the two facilities, who in turn will be overseen by researchers from Mzansi Ethical Research Centre (MERC). The research team will help to maintain the cold chain and drawing up doses of the vaccine, and the vaccinators will then administer the vaccines .

The committee impressed upon the department to ensure that  plans are in place to ensure the safe disposal of the Covid-19 vaccine vials to prevent the potential of reuse. Members of the committee said this issue was also raised with the provinces that have appeared before it in the past weeks.

On oxygen availability, the committee commended the department for ensuring that it had stock readily available and the system it has with Afrox that detects oxygen levels, thus ensuring prompt refills when required.

The committee said the issue of community healthcare workers needs attention as all provinces that have appeared before it have had to answer on how they are dealing with this matter. The department said a total of 6 119 community healthcare workers have been absorbed into the provincial department of health. The MEC for Health, Ms Sasekani Manzini, said community healthcare workers have been very helpful, especially during the pandemic.

The Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Health said in dealing with staff shortages, its recruitment drive has ensured the appointment of community service doctors, who are also the department’s bursary holders. On the issue of personal protective equipment (PPE), the province indicated that there are currently no shortages. In relation to isolation and quarantine sites, the province said isolation facilities are decreasing because of the decrease in the number of Covid-19 cases.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, DR SIBONGISENI DHLOMO.**