**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE COMMENDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ON RESTARTING THE JOHNSON AND JOHNSON VACCINE ROLL OUT PROGRAMME**

**Parliament, Wednesday,  28 April 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Health has noted and commended the Department of Health on restarting the Johnson & Johnson roll out vaccination programme.

On Wednesday, the Committee received an update from the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize on the latest developments regarding the Johnson & Johnson clinical trials, vaccines procurement and progress on the vaccination roll-out programme.

The Committee expressed its concern over the pace of the vaccine roll out in the country, especially considering that there are 880 new cases reported in the past 24 hours and that there is increased hospitalisation in certain provinces although there is a national decrease of 12.7%.

The committee enquired about the contingency plans that are in place to mitigate the third wave, should it arrive sooner than anticipated. Minister Mkhize said the modelling of the third wave has indicated that it is unpredictable and uncertain, but government will put in place strict adherence to health protocols including the wearing of masks, social distancing, washing of hands and sanitising.

In terms of hospitals, Minister Mkhize said government is monitoring the numbers and with the increase of numbers some of the temporary structures will be activated if the need arises.

Committee Chairperson, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, said with the information that the committee has been presented with, the country has now more than 60 million vaccines confirmed available which are most likely to go right over population herd immunity which was scientifically projected.

The committee has welcomed the plans and processes put in place to focus on the elderly and those that are over the age of 60, in that no one will be turned away at the vaccination sites if they have not registered. The department informed the Committee that an onsite registration will be taking place to assist all those have not managed to get registered.
On the procurement of vaccines, the committee has commended Minister Mkhize on the progress and engagements with Sputnik and Sinopharm.

The committee questioned Minister Mkhize on what plans government has in place to ensure that the crisis in India does not affect South Africa. Minister Mkhize said he is aligning himself with those who have expressed sympathy with the current wave that India is experiencing. However, Minister Mkhize said South Africa does not have a direct flight to India. “We are demanding tests for people that are coming through and from any other parts of the world”, said Minister Mkhize.

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