**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CALLS FOR ACCELERATION OF THE ROLL OUT OF VACCINATION**

**Parliament, Thursday, 01 July  2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Health received an update from the Acting Minister of Health, Ms Mmamaloko Kubayi-Ngubane, on the acquisition of other vaccines, the vaccine roll-out programme and on the new Delta variant.

Briefing the committee, the Deputy Director General for the Department of Health, Dr Anban Pillay, said vaccines can only be considered for procurement after registration by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA). Dr Pillay told the committee that the SAHPRA is currently reviewing the data relating to Sinovac, Sinopharm and Sputnik vaccines with the view of registering the vaccines.

He informed the committee that the Delta variant which was first sampled in India in October 2020 is now detected in 85 countries including in Africa, and it is now rapidly becoming dominant in many countries.  Dr Pillay said the variant has become the dominant SARS-CoV-2 variant in many countries around the world, including SA. He said there is now good evidence that Delta is more transmissible than previously circulating viruses and other variants of concern.

The committee welcomed the presentation but expressed concern over the slow pace of the vaccine roll-out. Some Members of the committee were of the view that the private sector needs to procure the vaccines to speed up the vaccination process and to use private bodies to allow for the distribution of the vaccines under strict regulations.

Acting Minister, Ms Kubayi-Ngubane said they are concerned with how they have fared in the vaccine roll out with over 60 populations and looking at what has caused the department not to reach its target. In addition, she said, currently the vaccination roll out is opening up to the over 50-year-old people and the people in the active economy, “hence the multi-phase approach of vaccinating which is what the government is undertaking”.

The committee was of the view that the presentation did not mention measures put in place by the department to assist South Africans with special needs and people living with disabilities to ensure that they are vaccinated.

Regarding the use of AstraZeneca, the committee asked the department about the existence of a process to source the drug again and whether will that be fast-tracked given the fact that clinical trials were done before.  In response, Dr Joe Phaahla, the Deputy Minister of the department, said the current information that they have regarding AstraZeneca is that it is efficacious for the current Delta variant and therefore there will be not need to register the drug as it is already registered and there is no need to seek approval from the regulator.

The committee commended the Limpopo Provincial Department of Health on the good work that it has done in going out to rural areas and villages in ensuring that the elderly people are registered and vaccinated.

Responding to the question from the committee on what does the department want to achieve with the lockdown, Dr Pillay said, it aims to flatten the curve of transmission of the virus and reduce hospitalisation and reduce the rate of mortality.

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