# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 2075**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 26 MAY 2023**

**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 19)**

**Ms M D Hlengwa (IFP) to ask the Minister of Health:**

With regard to the two cases of diphtheria, which is a vaccine-preventable serious infection that have been detected in the Republic, and in light of the hesitation from the public concerning vaccines which led to the Government being in possession of more than 30 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines, what consistent and successful campaigns has the Government kicked off in bringing and restoring trust to the public in terms of the culture of vaccinations? **NW2347E**

**REPLY:**

* Diphtheria vaccine is part of routine childhood immunisation programme, and it is administered and recorded on the child road to health booklet.
* The department, in partnership with non-governmental organization (NGOs) and the United Nations agencies have developed the following strategies and interventions that address vaccine hesitancy with an intent to restores vaccine confidence among the members of the public. These interventions are aimed at improving uptake and coverage of routine immunisation: These are:
  + - **The side-by-side campaign** which is health information and education through SABC radio stations, aired on 11 radio stations and in in 11 languages, educating and sharing information on the importance of childhood vaccination. This includes phone-in programme where questions and answers are provided on the spot. Furthermore, the side-by-side campaign is using various advocacy strategies such as social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, twitter, Instagram etc.) where messages are posted to address vaccine hesitancy on an individual level and importance of vaccination is communicated to communities. Channels such as **mobile audio-visual, social mobilisation trucks** for awareness. The department also makes use of media engagement radio slots, as well as ongoing public announcements and shows to improve full coverage.
    - **A nationwide immunisation catch-up drive** that was introduced at the end of 2020, 2021, 2022 and in 2023, which invites parents/guardians and caregivers to bring all eligible children who have missed their routine vaccination dates to be immunised. This will ensure that these children are fully immunised for age and fully protected against vaccine preventable diseases.
    - The Ward Based Outreach Primary Health Care (WBOTPHC) check the children vaccination status through the road-to-health booklets (RtHB) during the routine household visits. This enables them to check on all children who have missed a dose and those who are found to have missed their dates, they are referred to the nearest health facilities to receive the missed doses.
    - The department conducts health screening during the health events. On these days, professional nurses can check if mothers have taken their children for vaccination. This is done by the teams carrying vaccine cold boxes and all children who missed their doses are vaccinated onsite.
    - The Health Promoters deliver health education messages in health care facility, and these messages include asking parents/caregivers/guardians about the vaccination status of their children.
    - South Africa joins the whole of Africa to observe **Annual Africa Vaccination Week** (AVW) which is commemorated from 24-30 April. On these days, community members across all nine provinces are engaged and health workers make use of the opportunity to educate communities on the importance of people receiving vaccinations at regular and stated frequency. The further message that is shared during the vaccination week, is about educating members of the communities to avoid missing one or more doses within the national immunisation schedule.
    - **Implementation of immunisation recovery plan** is ongoing to obtain additional insights from different stakeholders, such as caregivers, health workers and other decision-makers, on the barriers related to supply, demand, enabling environment for the immunisation programme. This plan focuses on the delivery of vaccination services to the provinces/districts with high number of unimmunised communities as well as their perspectives on what strategies might be used to overcome the barriers to the delivery of vaccination services and how to improve coverage and equity.
* These strategies are ongoing to address vaccine hesitancy and to increase immunisation uptake and coverage. The effectiveness of these strategies is evidenced by improved immunisation coverage comparatively, to prior embarking on the immunisation catch-up drives. These were also intensified again during the measles outbreak and the measles immunisation campaign that were recently conducted.

END.