

ZIMBABWE DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE (ZDI)

ACCESS TO PUBLIC HEALTH MONITORING REPORT JULY 2021

Government Response to Covid-19 3rd Wave: More needs to be done



About the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI)

The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) is a politically independent and not for profit public policy think-tank based in Zimbabwe. Founded and registered as a trust in terms of the laws of Zimbabwe in November 2012, ZDI serves to generate and disseminate innovative ideas, cutting-edge research and policy analysis to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe. The institute also aims to promote open, informed and evidence-based debate by bringing together pro-democracy experts to platforms for debate. The idea is to offer new ideas to policy makers with the view to entrenching democratic practices in Zimbabwe. The ZDI researches, publishes and conducts national policy debates and conferences in democratization, good governance, public policy, human rights and transitional justice, media and democracy relations, electoral politics and international affairs.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19 THIRD WAVE - CITIZENS AT RISK

Following a surge in Covid-19 cases and subsequent localised lockdowns, the government of Zimbabwe introduced new level four lockdowns. The month of July has seen the government of Zimbabwe tightening lockdown measures. The country moved to level 4, this saw the closure of schools and tertiary institutions, ban in public gatherings, rationalising of personnel and hours of operation in various sectors and adoption of a 6pm curfew.

On the 6pm curfew, the cities of Harare and Bulawayo are experiencing congestion in roads leading to the central business centers; this has seen long queues at ZUPCO bus terminuses with no evidence of social distancing while experiencing pressure at illegal mushika-shika terminuses. These have become spreaders of the Covid-19 virus.¹

The shortage of public transport in Zimbabwe's capital Harare has been threatening to derail efforts to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, as commuters are hardly practicing any social distancing while in queues for busses. Prior to the pandemic, there were more 50 000 commuter

omnibuses operating in the country, the number has currently depleted by more than 80%.



Source: *The Chronicle*²

Commuters have been hit by shortage of public transport in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare and second largest city, Bulawayo amid Covid-19 pandemic since public transport is banned. There is a high possibility that people may contract and spread the virus as they are using private transport where many people are often seen bundled up in pick-up trucks, lorries and illegal 'kombis' disregarding all the Covid-19 safety precautions of physical distancing and sanitization.

The currently available mode of public transport, a parastatal company which operates for urban and long distance bus routes, the Zimbabwe

² The Chronicle. Chaotic scenes at transport queues expose commuters to Covid-19. Image available at:

<https://www.chronicle.co.zw/chaotic-scenes-at-transport-queues-expose-commuters-to-covid-19/>

United Passenger Company (ZUPCO) does not have enough capacity to ferry people to and from their destinations.

Lack of compliance to measures by those in power has also been ascribed to the spread of the pandemic. On the ban of public gatherings, ZANU-PF has been holding political meetings with more than 40 participants while the Johane Marange church also held their annual conference physically in Manicaland. This means the two parties were not in compliance with lockdown measures which prohibited public gatherings and only allowing 30 people at funerals. On the 14th of July 2021, the ZANU PF party convened the ordinary session of its Politburo meeting which was attended by close to 50 members. From the 3rd of July 2021 to the 17th, the Johane Marange church congregated for their annual festival in the heart of a pandemic. Human rights lawyers wrote to the police demanding justification and it seemed the police showed no action.

AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF COVID-19 VACCINES IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS ZIMBABWE

The rise of covid-19 positive cases has raised fear in citizens hence the drive to vaccinate. With the government opening vaccination for everyone, the month of July has witnessed a high demand in vaccination. As at 29 July 2021, a population of 1

593 656 were vaccinated while thousands are queuing for vaccination daily. This makes us to question the availability and accessibility of vaccines in Zimbabwe.



Ministry of Information, Publicity & Broadcasting
@InfoMinZW

#PostCabinetBriefing
#ZimVaccination

The national Covid19 vaccination programme is now open to everyone. Frontline personnel will still be prioritised at vaccination centres.



Source: Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting
Twitter page

Citizens are experiencing long vaccination queues, with some sleeping at vaccination centers and later denied vaccination access. This demotivates citizens to vaccinate or even worse as it promotes corruption. Participants in Zimbabwe Democracy Institute WhatsApp groups mentioned that some citizens are going to the extent of paying \$20 to \$30 in order to be

vaccinated at local clinics.³ They added that these handouts were given to nurses or other health workers so as to avoid queuing. This also speaks to lack of motivation and poor salaries on the side of health professionals.



Source: The Herald

According to Nick Mangwana, the deputy minister of information and publicity, as at 28 July 2021, the government of Zimbabwe received 6 785 000 vaccines. The deputy minister added that further 5 million fully paid for are expected between today and September.⁴

In bid to achieve diversity, with effect from the 25th of July 2021, the government of Zimbabwe authorised the use of the Johnson and Johnson Covid-19 vaccine, making it the first Western vaccine approved for use in the country. According to world rates, the Johnson and

Johnson Covid-19 vaccine is cheaper ranging from \$10 and only one dosage is need while the most popular in Zimbabwe, Sinovac ranges from \$30 requiring two doses⁵.

SHOULD VACCINATION BE MANDATORY?

The Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Senator Monica Mutsvangwa announced that in light of the continued

rise in Covid-19 cases, Cabinet approved the following: the decongesting of both public and private sector workplaces. In taking the lead, government has further reduced its workforce to 25%. Priority is to be given to vaccinated personnel; (ii) that the courts of law be opened only for remand and urgent cases; and (ii) that all civil servants should be vaccinated and those that fall ill without having been vaccinated will not be entitled to the COVID-19 insurance.

³ Participants in ZDI WhatsApp group, July 2021.

⁴ <https://zimfact.org/factsheet-zimbabwe-covid-19-vaccination-dashboard/>

⁵Zimbabwe approves J&J Covid-19 vaccine <https://news.yahoo.com/zimbabwe-approves-j-j-covid-111908928.html>

Staff Notice

21 July 2021

ALL EXECUTIVES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

COVID-19 THIRD WAVE MANAGEMENT ESCALATION

The company takes note of the intensification of the COVID-19 situation in the country and the consequent response by the Government in terms of decongestion and vaccination.

Building on this and our response plan that has been guiding our operations to ensure everyone's safety and business continuity, the company wishes to guide all management and staff as follows:

1. OFFICE DECONGESTION

As an essential service provider and to ensure that we do not compromise service provisioning to our clients, staff rotation will remain in place as per previous guidance. Under the arrangement, teams are divided into two groups with one group working from home and another working from office using one-week rotation cycles.

2. IMMEDIATE LEAVE FOR UNVACCINATED STAFF MEMBERS

Due to the reduction of business as a result of the reduced service uptake by both Enterprise clients and Government sector, the company is experiencing a decrease in the productive hours. As such, staff will be required to immediately take vacation leave starting with those that are **not vaccinated**. This is especially because unvaccinated individuals are at the highest risk of the effects of the COVID-19 virus, while also posing a great risk to all other staff and the company's business continuity.

Line management will be expected to provide an update to Corporate Services by 23 July 2021 in this regard.

3. VACCINATION

It is key for staff to ensure that they are vaccinated as this is a proven means of managing the impact of the COVID-19 virus. Staff are advised that besides this being good protection for themselves, the company may soon take further measures against the unvaccinated in order to protect vaccinated staff members and the business.

Source: TechZim

Citizens in Zimbabwe, noted with concern that the vaccination program should be voluntary, no worker should be forced to be vaccinated. Government owned entities such as TelOne have made vaccination mandatory by sending unvaccinated workers on leave. Other companies have also responded by sending their unvaccinated workers on leave.

Mandatory vaccine vaccination is most likely to lead to dishonesty and corruption. In the past months the government has been dealing with faked covid-19 testing certificates. This was evidence that mandatory politics do not work in

Zimbabwe and the same might be done with vaccination cards.

It is crucial that the government put more effort in availing information on vaccination, most citizens deny vaccination because of lack of adequate and necessary information of vaccination. Some citizens, have attributed the vaccine to the biblical 'mark of the beast' while some say the vaccine is a 'silent killer.' This shows that the government must avail much information on the vaccine to communities so as to motivate them to vaccinate instead of making vaccination mandatory.

Recommendations

Government

- Must ensure the availability of adequate and quality COVID-19 vaccines to enable every willing citizen to be vaccinated in line with its constitutional mandate of guaranteeing every citizen with access to basic health care services.
- Must decentralise the accessibility of vaccines.
- There is need to employ more health professionals so as to decongest the current long queues.

Non-Governmental Organisations

- Intensifying advocacy efforts to demand information on COVID-19 vaccines procurement including the quantity and costs incurred.
- Educating communities on their rights in the midst of a crisis or pandemic.
- Work with the government in ensuring citizens is well informed on the pandemic and vaccination.

Media

- Consistently update the public on information pertaining to Covid-19 response and ensuring adequate information access.
- Report on marginalised communities' access to Covid-19 vaccines.
- Must track down, monitor and report corruption the health sector, pertaining to vaccination procurement, deployment and administration.