

Ministry staff rush to comply with government vaccination directive

By Janerose Wanzira

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection organized for its officers to be vaccinated at the Ministry's headquarters in compliance with a directive by the Head of Public Service Joseph Kinyua.

Through a circular released on 9th August, Kinyua directed all public servants to get vaccinated in the next 14 days or face disciplinary action. "Those who will not have been given the first jab by 23rd August 2021 will be treated as discipline cases and appropriate action taken against them," said Kinyua in a memo.

In compliance with this directive, the first vaccination exercise by the Ministry of Labour was conducted on 11th August however not all staff were vaccinated necessitating a second round.

These efforts to prioritise civil servants in the vaccination rollout with the limited vaccine supplies saw several officers turn up to be vaccinated.

Kinyua said that the decision to vaccinate all public officers was informed by the National Security Advisory Committee (NSAC).

"In a recent NSAC meeting, it was reported that there was a low uptake of Covid-19 vaccines among public servants especially the security sector, teachers and the core civil service. This is against a background of access to vaccines having greatly improved especially among these groups," said Kinyua in a memo.

The vaccination exercise was conducted for the second time for the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection staff at the NSSF building on 18th August at the Silo's Ground Floor Parking lot where thousands of officers received the AstraZeneca vaccine while being advised to continue abiding with the rules of mandatory masking, social distancing, regular hand washing and use of sanitizers, good ventilation, and seeking care early if symptoms are noticed.

Whereas the vaccine is free for all Kenyans, some employees stated that the time away from work to be vaccinated or fear of the side effects is no longer a barrier to adoption.

The cost of transportation to and from hospital because of absenteeism have been curtailed by conducting vaccination at the Ministry`s offices.

The State Department for Social Protection asked all department heads to adjust their times and shift schedules to accommodate officer`s vaccination appointments, particularly during working hours.

Some officers brought their families and friends to benefit from the free available vaccination.

Kenya is grappling with the new Covid-19 Delta variant. The Delta variant is a serious threat because it is much more transmissible, necessitating a recent lockdown of the western part of the country.

The Delta variant changed the dynamics, in that unless and until more of the Kenya public is vaccinated, infections, hospitalizations, and deaths are likely to increase across much of the country and Nairobi.

The Ministry staff are among 2.73 million Kenyans that have so far been vaccinated as of 22nd August according to data by Ministry of Health.

So far 2.9% of Kenyans have been fully vaccinated. Kenya received some 880,460 doses of the Moderna vaccine from the United States via the COVAX facility in a bid to boost the vaccination efforts.

Kenya has developed a Covid-19 vaccination rollout plan to vaccinate the 47 million citizens with COVAX doses.

The Covid-19 vaccination drive has been marred with misinformation creating fear and stigmatization among the public and slowed down the vaccine uptake.

Vaccine hesitancy is a major barrier to vaccine uptake and the achievement of herd immunity, which is required to protect the most vulnerable populations.

Kenyans are being urged to take all precautions and get vaccinated to curb the spread of the virus.