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Ministry of Health, Wellness & Elderly Affairs

Communications on this subject should be addressed to:
Permanent Secretary

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Press Release

COVID-19 BOOSTER DOSES AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC

Approximately one month ago, the National Immunization Program introduced the COVID-19 booster - an additional dose administered to increase the body's immune response, and further help extend the protection gained from the first two doses. At the time of introduction, only the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine was offered to persons who received their complete regimen of Astrazeneca over 6 months ago. Over the past few weeks, there have been further developments - Astrazeneca COVID-19 Vaccine is now offered as a booster. The WHO supports an extended primary series with an additional vaccine dose for COVID-19 vaccination especially for individuals with immunocompromising conditions. While the booster is recommended for the high-risk population, other individuals can come forward for the booster dose. To date 1309 Booster doses have been administered.

Saint Lucia is nine months into the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines. As of Monday November 22, 2021, a total of 53, 818 doses of vaccines have been administered. This is inclusive of both first and second doses. Out of that 45, 521 persons have been vaccinated with the complete regimen, accounting for 25.1% of the population fully vaccinated.

To ensure equitable global vaccine rollout, the World Health Organisation (WHO) target for COVID-19 vaccine coverage is 40% by December 2021, and 70% by June 2022. Whilst some countries have achieved the 40% target, others, like Saint Lucia are still behind.

The Ministry of Health, Wellness & Elderly Affairs remains steadfast in the response to the pandemic; and continues to encourage individuals to protect themselves and loved ones from COVID-19.

Both vaccines are available at all vaccination sites. The Pfizer BioNtech was initially approved for persons 18 years and older; then subsequently for 12 to 17 year olds. We hear of approval in some countries for children 5 to 11 years; and as such, there has been many inquiries regarding the introduction of Pfizer to this age group. Saint Lucia continues to rely on the recommendations of the World Health Organization for guidance on vaccines and vaccination. To date, WHO/PAHO does not recommend any COVID-19 vaccine to be used in persons younger than 12.

The COVID-19 vaccine produced by Pfizer was approved by the United States FDA for pediatric populations (children aged 5-11) on October 29, 2021 and then recommended by the CDC. Various countries in the Caribbean region are considering vaccinating children younger than 12 with the Pfizer vaccine. Whilst the national regulatory agency of each country has the authority to issue this approval; it is important to note that the pediatric Pfizer vaccine has a different formulation and dosage than the Pfizer vaccine authorized for adults.

The vaccine authorized for use in children aged 5-11 includes the same mRNA and lipids, but different inactive ingredients compared to the vaccine that is used in individuals aged 12 or older. The pediatric and adult preparation also differs in dosage, and reconstitution. Additionally, children can not receive a fractionated dose of the adult Pfizer vaccine in place of a pediatric dose.

In order to launch vaccination for this age group, Saint Lucia must receive the pediatric vaccine doses. In light of this, Saint Lucia awaits the approval from the World Health Organization before introducing to this target group. In the interim, the Ministry of Health, Wellness & Elderly Affairs has begun the necessary arrangements to access and procure the Pediatric Pfizer vaccine.

The Ministry appeals to the citizenry to continue accessing vaccines at the nearest vaccination site, including all the Wellness Centres. Vaccines save lives; and are the most cost-effective intervention against infectious diseases.

Until widespread vaccination has been achieved, both vaccinated and unvaccinated persons are urged to adhere to the infection prevention and control measures required to control the pandemic.

The Ministry of Health will provide further vaccination update next week.

For more information please contact the Office of the Chief Medical Officer or the Epidemiology Unit, at 468-5309/468-5317 respectively