

Numerous factors influence vaccination rates

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As Covid vaccination rates slow down, vaccine hesitancy has increasingly entered the news, alongside discussions around the pandemic.

However, according to experts, it was a "big mistake" to only consider vaccine hesitancy when many more factors influence vaccination rates.

In a virtual Nobel-inspired lecture, former chair of the government's ministerial advisory committee on Covid, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, said other factors included the lack of supply, misinformation and failure to manufacture vaccines, even when there are enough resources.

"One of the mistakes we have made as a country, among the many things we could have done differently, would be quite a long list. But I think we should have taken a stronger position in trying to make a vaccine," he said.

"We have previously made vaccines and we have significant technology to be able to do that."

Abdool Karim said there was a need to increase the vaccine coverage at a faster rate, because the government should be aiming to get significant coverage in especially the elderly to minimise the impact in the hospitals.

"They will get vaccinated when it's convenient. They are not rushing out there and they are not going to stand in queues," he added.

"They do not mind getting vaccinated, but we've got to find a way to reach those individuals and that means that our vaccine approach has to continually change because we are trying to reach different groups."

He also said another thing that was really taking its toll on the country at the moment was the very strong anti-vaccine sentiments and the way in which misinformation was being spread on various platforms.

"I think those are very difficult to counter because it's a small group of people who are being amplified by others," Abdool Karim said.

"As a country, we need to deal with professionals in a way that ensures they do not distribute information that is not certain to be accurate."

He applauded government for the ongoing campaigns to promote and encourage vaccinations across the country.

"I think the way the president announced the whole Vooma campaign is something that is on the right track because we've got to get our vaccines out there to individuals in order to get coverage," he said.

Meanwhile, vaccinologist Professor Shabir Madhi said the focus was incorrect, as vaccinating 70% of the adult population before the next resurgence was unlikely to be achieved.

"The main goal is preventing hospitalisation and death. To achieve that, more would be

gained by targeting vaccinating 85-90% of adults older than 50 years than vaccinating 50% of adults over 18 years," he said.

Epidemiologist Dr Jo Barnes said government was reaping some of the consequences of their early handling of the pandemic.

"The same government who

sent in the police and banned all sorts of nonsensical things like short-sleeved T-shirts is now asking people to get vaccinated," she said.

"There is a lack of trust in the process among large parts of the population."

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