

EVALUATION

New study launched to assess Moderna booster

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THE SA Medical Research Council (SAMRC) has launched a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the Moderna booster for Covid-19.

Yesterday, the Sisonke study team led by the SAMRC launched the Sherpa study, which aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Moderna booster against Covid-19 infections and severe Covid-19 disease among health-care workers.

Sherpa stands for Sisonke heterologous mRNA-1273 boost after prime with Ad26.COV2.S.

The study is sponsored by the SAMRC and co-funded by Moderna. It hopes to enrol up to 15000 participants who received either a single dose or two doses of the Johnson & Johnson Janssen vaccine (Ad26.COV2.S) as part

of the Sisonke study for health-care workers.

The Sherpa study was piloted between May 23-27 with 30 participants already enrolled.

SAMRC said this would allow the study team to investigate the effectiveness of the Moderna Covid-19 booster against new variants in South Africa, and to provide additional data to the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (Sahpra) for potential licensing.

Co-principal Investigator, Dr Nigel Garrett said: "The Covid-19 pandemic is not over yet and many people have not taken up a booster dose. The Sherpa study will provide crucial data on heterologous boosting and may help to licence another effective vaccine in South Africa."

Dr Garrett said they hope to present preliminary data by October 2022.

"All Sisonke study participants (health-care workers) already received at least one or two Johnson and Johnson dose/s as part of the larger study. It is most appropriate to offer these participants a Moderna booster now. The primary Moderna vaccination schedule is also being studied in South Africa as part of the COVFN3008 Ubuntu trial. Both studies are providing safety and effectiveness data to Sahpra, the regulator. This will be important for licensing the Moderna product in South Africa," he said.

Sahpra spokesperson Yuven Gounden said Sahpra had not received an application from Moderna at this stage and therefore could not provide comment on this.

The Sisonke programme is a collaboration between the National Health Department, SAMRC, Desmond Tutu Health Foundation, Caprisa, and

Johnson & Johnson. The Sisonke programme allowed the government to roll-out the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to health-care workers using the research programme. The Sisonke programme differs from that of a clinical trial, which facilitated the use of the vaccine while the licensing process took place.

The Sisonke programme resulted in nearly 500000 health-care workers vaccinated against Covid-19 with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Meanwhile, the Western Cape recorded 11 199 active cases of Covid-19, 712 732 confirmed cases, with 679 425 recoveries, as at 1pm yesterday. To date, 22 108 people have succumbed due to Covid-19 related illness. The province added 791 new Covid-19 cases since the previous daily update. The province also reported 19 361 Covid-19 reinfections.