

## Drive to increase vaccine uptake ahead of festive season

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As part of efforts to ramp-up vaccinations for the country ahead of the festive season, an initiative by the department of health – the second leg of the Vooma vaccination weekend – is set to begin today until Sunday.

Epidemiologist Dr Jo Barnes said the country required to do whatever it took to encourage vaccinations.

“Even the media who played such an important role in spreading the messages are an essential part of this national effort,” she said.

“I would really like to see much more government attention to ventilation in public buildings as lack of proper ven-

tilation has been proven to be a factor in the spread of the virus.”

Barnes added there were various reasons why Gauteng had a low uptake for the vaccine.

“Lack of trust in the government is a factor. So far, the majority of messages to vaccinate came from government-connected sources,” she said.

“As we have seen in the recent local government elections, there is a significant trust deficit among many people about the efficiency and will of the government in dealing with their everyday problems.”

A statement by the Gauteng health department added President Cyril Ramaphosa urged leaders across the board to help spread awareness about the campaign.

The statement said “the first Vooma vaccination weekend led to an unprecedented level of engagement and active mobilisation across many districts. It achieved 75% of its target of 500 000 vaccinations over the three-day period, and we hope to achieve 100% of that target in the following Vooma vaccination weekend.”

Gauteng health spokesperson Foster Mohale said not only is the department using different channels of communication about the vaccine as a way of not allowing anti-vaxxers to win, but the initiative was mainly to encourage society to vaccinate.

“We will be on the ground. We also engaged different sectors of society such as religious leaders, traditional leaders, civil societies and unions. We are also us-

ing a variety of incentives that we have recently introduced earlier this month, such as the R100 voucher given to the over-60 year olds and *mahala* Uber rides to vaccination sites where Uber will cover two free trips of up to R100 each to and from select vaccination sites across the country,” he said.

Public health lawyer Safura Abdool Karim said although the Vooma vaccination campaign helped to increase the number of sites during the weekend, the government still needed to deal with underlying issues around the vaccine.

“Incentives really help with people who need a reason to get a vaccine, but don’t help when people are not able to take a vaccine for other reasons.”