COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs

1. **What is the purpose of taking a vaccine?**
   Vaccination is a safe and effective way to prevent disease and save lives. When we get vaccinated, we do not just protect ourselves, but also those around us. Some people, like those who are seriously ill, are advised not to get certain vaccines – so they depend on the rest of us to get vaccinated and help reduce the spread of disease.

   Vaccines use your body's natural defences to build resistance to specific infections and make your immune system stronger, so it is able to fight against infection better, should you contract the virus. One of the perks of taking the vaccine is that if you are exposed to COVID-19, i.e. identified as a direct contact, it is unlikely that you will have to be quarantined.

2. **What is the difference between the different brands of vaccines available?**

   There are now a number of vaccines that are available globally ,which have all been shown to be effective against COVID-19. The vaccines differ in the following ways:
   - Their composition which influences how they act on the human cell to initiate an immune response
   - The number of doses required
   - The strains they are most effective against
   - Rates of efficacy
   - Side effect profile

   With this said, in order for any vaccine to be made available to the public, it has to have been trailed and shown to be safe for use, as well as effectively against the disease for which is has been made. So even if there is a slight difference in side effects and rates of efficacy, it is important to stress that <u>all</u> the vaccines currently available in South Africa are safe and effective for use against COVID-19.

3. **Does the vaccine that is available in SA cover the same strain of COVID-19 or is it different?**
   The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has proven effective against the 501.V2 variant that is currently affecting South Africa. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccine have also been shown to be effective against this variant.

4. **What are the side effects of taking the COVID-19 vaccine?**
   Some people reported no side effects. For those that do get side effects, these are mostly mild to moderate and short-lasting resolving within 2- 3 days. They include:
   - Fever
   - Fatigue
   - Headache
   - Muscle pain

- Chills
- Diarrhoea
- Pain at the injection site

The chances of any of these side effects following vaccination differ according to the specific COVID-19 vaccine. More serious or long-lasting side effects to vaccines are possible but extremely rare. Vaccines are continually monitored to detect rare adverse events. Complications like blood clots are VERY rare with the vaccine (1 in a million). Blood clots from Covid (severe disease) are more common - 1 in 150 000.
The more people in the community that are vaccinated, the lower the transmission will be and this will help get the pandemic under control.

5. **How much does it cost to get the vaccine (cash)?**
   For insured individuals, funding will be derived from their medical schemes and administered for free at the point of service. Uninsured individuals will be funded by the Government and the vaccination will be free at the point of service.

6. **If I had COVID-19 previously, do I still need to get the vaccine?**
   People who have already been infected with SARS-CoV-2 should still get vaccinated unless told otherwise by their health care provider. Even if you've had a previous infection, the vaccine acts as a booster that strengthens the immune response.

7. **If I take the vaccine, will it protect me from getting COVID-19 in the future?**
   The COVID-19 Vaccines are very effective, however, a small percentage of people who are fully vaccinated will still get COVID-19 if they are exposed to the live virus that causes it. You may still get mild disease despite being vaccinated, and you can still be a carrier and pass in onto others. The good news is that all the vaccines are effective in protecting you against severe illness.

8. **Do I still need to wear a mask and practice good hygiene once vaccinated?**
   YES! The vaccine is one of many tools that need to be used to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Remember that you may still get COVID-19 after being vaccinated and even if you do not have symptoms, you could still pass it to other people if you do not wear a mask, regularly wash your hands and practice good respiratory hygiene.