



Commission for Gender Equality
A society free from gender oppression and inequality

Media Release

For Immediate Release: 16 January 2022

To: Editors, Producers and Reporters

WARNING AGAINST IMPOSING MANDATORY COVID-19 VACCINATION ON EMPLOYEES AND STUDENTS

As South Africa continues to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) has noted a new study published in Obstetrics & Gynaecology medical journal, released on 05 January 2022, that has found that vaccines may cause a small change to the menstrual cycle length, but that this change is temporary. While health experts believe this finding is not clinically significant, the Commission would like to caution businesses and various institutions against forcing employees to vaccinate and imposing harsh sanctions on them if they do not. The Commission is aware that several companies in the corporate and retail sectors have introduced mandatory vaccinations in their workplaces, and many more may follow suit.

The CGE would like to warn that mandatory vaccination mandates do not supersede the South Africa's Constitution and its provisions. Section 12 (2) of the Constitution states that everyone has the right to bodily and psychological integrity, which includes the right— (a) to make decisions concerning reproduction; (b) to security in and control over their body; and (c) not to be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without their informed consent.

The Commission is concerned that employees who do not vaccinate may have their contracts terminated by employers if vaccination mandates are allowed to continue without taking the workers' human rights into consideration. The country's retail sector employs a high number of young females as cashiers and cleaners, and many of them are not in a position to negotiate with their employers, if they do not wish to vaccinate.

Maintaining public health, reaching herd immunity, and preventing mutating Covid-19 variants are noble acts but should not be achieved by trampling the basic human rights that are enshrined in the Constitution. When scientists establish a connection between Covid-19 vaccinations and women's reproductive health, such as menstrual cycles, many women may not be comfortable taking vaccines, due to possible long-term effects. These women's wish to delay vaccinating should be respected in the context of our country's human rights commitment.



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The Commission is also calling for institutions of higher learning to afford the same respect to students and workers who may not wish to vaccinate. Due to our country's legacy of oppression, economic inequality and limited access to information, many students and workers are not empowered to negotiate with big corporates and institutions. The Commission has long taken a commitment to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive health rights of girls, women, and men. It must be acknowledged that Covid-19 is a relatively new pandemic, and that scientists in South Africa and around the world are still working to assess long-term effects of vaccines. This is more critical for women, who have to manage menstrual health, contraception, and sexual reproduction, as part of their reproductive health.

END

Issued by Commission for Gender Equality

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The Commission for Gender Equality is established in terms of Section 181 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa to promote respect for gender equality and the protection, development, and attainment of gender equality.

Toll Free Number: 0800 007 709. GBV Toll Free Number: 0800 428 428, Stop Gender Violence: 0800 150 150 Witness, Survivors and victims of GBV can send Please Call Me at *120*7867#