

Adult vaccination could stop unnecessary deaths

Vaccines are very much top of mind at the moment as the world races to beat the Covid-19 pandemic, but there are many other preventable diseases and deaths that can be avoided if adults are vaccinated.



Dr Thulani Mhlanga, medical manager for vaccines at Pfizer South Africa

This is reflected in a [report](#) released before the pandemic which reveals a 200% higher mortality rate from vaccine-preventable deaths in adults than in children.

Not only is it important for adults to be vaccinated from a health perspective. This is important because it can have a positive impact on local social and economic developments while also having a beneficial ripple effect on the adult's family, community, and country. "With this in mind, it is key to drive awareness around the importance of adult vaccinations as many people don't think adults need to be vaccinated," Dr Thulani Mhlanga, medical manager for vaccines at Pfizer South Africa.

Why adults get vaccinated

"Adults may have missed being administered a certain vaccine as a child or may be more susceptible to contracting a vaccine-preventable disease for reasons such as being immunocompromised or living with a chronic illness. Along with this, our immune systems decrease when we are older which makes adults more susceptible to getting diseases," he says.

One such vaccine that shows the importance of this is the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV), which has been available in South Africa since 2009. "Not only has the vaccine since then reduced childhood incidents of pneumococcal diseases which can be fatal, but it has also protected adults living with HIV, those that are immunocompromised, those over 65, smokers, people with heart and lung diseases as well as diabetes from getting the same disease.

"Vaccines like PCV are crucial as we believe that the only sustainable response to possible infection is prevention. This can be done by ensuring everyone is vaccinated, at the right time, with the right vaccines, throughout their lives," Mhlanga says.

Access and affordability can be bolstered

Subsequently, Mhlanga points out that Covid-19 has shone a spotlight on the need for countries to have vaccine manufacturing capacity to improve access and affordability. Being able to manufacture vaccines locally has a positive impact on costs, security of supply, production control and socio-economic development, he explains.

For example, to improve and create access to PCV, Pfizer entered into a public private partnership (PPP) with the Biovac Institute and the Department of Health in 2015 to manufacture PCV locally as part of the country's expanded programme on immunisation (EPI).

In addition to its manufacturing and delivery of life-saving vaccines, Biovac plays a critical role in the economy. It is the only Southern African human vaccine manufacturer, ensuring the country has the required domestic capacity to respond to both local and regional vaccine needs. "Biovac demonstrates just how powerful and efficiently run PPP can be, especially one that ensures the survival and health outcomes of the country's most important assets, its people," says Mhlanga.

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