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Ramaphosa says employees may refuse vaccination on medical and constitutional grounds

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President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Jaco Marais (Netwerk24)

President Cyril Ramaphosa says mandatory Covid-19 vaccination must be based on respect.

According to the president, workers may refuse vaccination on medical and constitutional grounds.

On Friday, Ramaphosa told the National Assembly more needed to be done to educate hesitant South Africans on Covid-19 vaccines.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has said the implementation of mandatory Covid-19 vaccination must be based on mutual respect and the rights of people.

Ramaphosa also said he believed employees may refuse vaccination on medical and constitutional grounds.

If necessary, Ramaphosa said, steps should be taken to responsibly accommodate workers who do not want to be vaccinated, including allowing those who can to continue working from home.

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Ramaphosa answered questions from lawmakers in the National Assembly on Friday and responded to the issue of mandatory vaccination.

"The implementation of any mandatory vaccination policies must, in the end, be based on mutual respect, which is the respect of the rights of the people which

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Ramaphosa said:

No one should be forced to be vaccinated. Instead, we need to use the available scientific evidence to encourage, repeat encourage, people to be vaccinated to protect themselves, but also to protect people around them.

He also said, at the same time, occupational health and safety laws required a safe working environment.

"This situation poses challenges for employers who want to keep their workers safe from Covid-19, while respecting the rights of those who don't want to be vaccinated," Ramaphosa said.

At a press briefing preceding Ramaphosa's session in the National Assembly on Friday, Health Minister Joe Phaahla said the government's position on mandatory vaccination "is very clear".

He said at the moment, the government's priority was not to legislate mandatory vaccination. He said the government will be observing the discussions in the private sector.

"Our priority is to mobilise people to come forward voluntarily and take the vaccine," said Phaahla.

Just under one-quarter of the South African adult population has had at least one vaccine jab. This equates to just under 10 million individuals.

About 3.6 million people were fully vaccinated, said Phaahla.

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ACDP leader Kenneth Meshoe said the right to vaccinate or not has been taken away from totalitarian governments.

"Emerging dictators are trying to force people to take vaccines they don't want. This must be resisted by the people of the world," he said.

IFP MP Narend Singh said more needed to be done to convince South Africans to get vaccinated.

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President Cyril Ramaphosa announced on Monday, August 16, that South Africans only will be allowed to travel between provinces for essential services to combat the spread of COVID-19.

"Mr President, I want to submit that words like encourage, mutual respect, really don't resonate with those that are anti-vaxxers. And we have to do more. We really have to do more than encourage and ask for mutual respect, honourable president.

"I'm a law-abiding citizen, I'm a God-fearing man, but when legal people and religious people get involved in a debate which centres around human life, when one loses siblings and friends and relatives in front of you, young people, I mean, this debate should take another dimension," he said.

*If you come across Covid-19 vaccination information that you do not trust, read **Covid-19 vaccine myths debunked: Get the facts here**. If you can't find the facts*

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