



MEDIA STATEMENT / 15 JUNE 2022

COVID Comms issues Youth Day appeal: Get vaccinated!

COVID Comms is appealing to young South Africans to commemorate Youth Day by getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

Statistics show that only 37% of young South Africans have had their jab, at a time when COVID-19 continues to be a serious threat to personal health and to the health of communities – in particular, Long COVID, which has a tremendously debilitating effect across all age groups.

“Show you care – get your jab” is the slogan used by COVID Comms in its Youth Day appeal, which is being distributed on its social media and Whatsapp channels across the country from today.

To increase vaccine take-up among young people, COVID Comms -- a volunteer network of communicators and content creators -- is currently running a series of vaccine awareness workshops targeted specifically at young South Africans, in partnership with the non-profit group Youth Lab.

Working jointly, COVID Comms and Youth Lab have run more than 350 workshops since the initiative was launched last year, and another 250 are scheduled over the next five weeks.

“We’ve already reached more than 7 000 people at these workshops, thanks largely to Youth Lab’s network of credible community activists and grants from the Solidarity Fund,” says COVID Comms chairperson Chris Vick.

“The reality is that we still find high levels of hesitancy among young South Africans, who feel the threat of COVID-19 has dropped significantly in communities. There is complacency around COVID-19, and apathy around COVID-19 messaging.

“But we can’t let that stop this important work – COVID-19 is real and can cause serious health damage.”

COVID Comms has found that when its facilitators explain in face-to-face meetings what COVID-19 can do – in the short-term and long-term – vaccine take-up among young South Africans increases noticeably.

Vick adds: “Youth Lab has put tremendous energy and resources into making sure we reach as many young communities as possible, and we deeply appreciate our partnership. It shows what can be done when you combine skilled communicators and targeted messaging with experienced community mobilisers, and forge real partnerships aimed at specific communities – rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

“It’s clear that we need a combination of communication and engagement with young people – where we listen to their concerns and provide fact-based answers – if we are to increase vaccination levels.

“People have genuine questions about COVID-19, and we need to be able to provide a space where they can raise those questions – and get answers from their peers, in a language and format they can understand, and preferably in their mother tongue,” says Vick.

“To spread the message even further, we then use selected footage from the workshops – with participants’ permission – on our various communications channels as ‘Vaccine Diaries’, which are well-received.

“Obviously there’s much more to be done, and we’ve recently expanded our partnership to include collaboration with other civil society groups – the South African Council of Churches and the Community Constituency Front in particular – so we can increase our reach and impact.”

How the workshops work

- COVID Comms’ technology team has developed a phone-based app that enables it to track the team of more than 100 facilitators who run workshops in their own communities.
- Each facilitator undergoes a training session with the COVID Comms/Youth Lab team, using a plain language training manual that is produced in all 11 official languages.
- Facilitators then convene small COVID-compliant workshops in their communities – with an audience of between 20 and 40 mostly young people – to explain COVID-19 and emphasise the importance of vaccination as a preventive measure.
- Using the app, an attendance register is developed and feedback is provided to COVID Comms and Youth Lab on issues raised, the response to the content, and whether or not participants are vaccinated.
- More details – and a map showing your nearest vaccine site -- are available at www.covidcomms.org.za

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