



Vaccine and Infectious Diseases Forum of Sri Lanka

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COVID 19 VACCINES – STATEMENT FROM THE VACCINE AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES FORUM OF SRI LANKA

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There is some expectation among the public that COVID 19 vaccines would be available in Sri Lanka very soon, even in a month or so. This is far from the truth.

There are claims from Pfizer and Moderna that their vaccines are 95% effective. However, these are interim results announced in the public domain before completion of Phase 3 studies. As studies are not complete, results have not been published in scientific journals. These vaccines are not registered under any internationally recognized regulatory bodies or by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Moderna expects their vaccine to be available to the public in next spring. Even then it will not be available in Sri Lanka. This is because millions of doses of vaccines of these manufacturers have been already contracted to USA and EU and other countries. Sri Lanka has no such contracts with the manufacturers of these vaccines. As these vaccines have not completed safety studies and as no recognized regulatory body has registered them, Sri Lanka is not in a position to make upfront payment and reservations for them.

The only way that Sri Lanka would get the vaccine would be through COVAX – the initiative of the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), WHO and others. COVAX pledges to give all low- and middle-income countries equitable access to vaccines. The vaccines will be made available to priority groups. These include healthcare and social care workers, elderly, and persons with chronic non-communicable diseases. However, the chances are that WHO/COVAX would be able to provide some vaccine doses to Sri Lanka towards the end of 2021. WHO/COVAX has pledged that they would reserve a supply of vaccines necessary for only about 20% of our total population, and Sri Lanka will have to pay for them. They have also indicated that they do not wish to buy vaccines that exceed a cost of 20 USD per dose for any country.

Thus, it is time to face reality. It is necessary to implement mechanisms to educate the public on getting vulnerable persons to hospital early, for management of complications of COVID 19 to prevent unnecessary deaths.

It is necessary to continue vigorously public health recommendations on wearing face masks, social distancing, hand washing and related mechanisms which have stood the test of time even from the times of the Spanish Flu of 1918.

(The Vaccine and Infectious Diseases Forum of Sri Lanka was established over a decade ago. Its objectives are to educate healthcare workers and the public regarding vaccines and vaccination and to have a dialogue with the Ministry of Health on vaccine related matters. It consists among others of immunologists, microbiologists, paediatricians, community physicians and family physicians who practice vaccination and/or have an interest in vaccines)

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