UPDATE ON CURRENT HEALTH WORKFORCE INITIATIVES IN LIGHT OF THE SECOND WAVE OF THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

13 January 2020

Risk Allowances and Insurance

All health workers in the public health sector, including Nurses, have continued to receive their monthly COVID-19 Risk Allowances in line with the following categories, low, medium and high risks. The levels of payment being ZWL$1,500, ZWL$2,250 and ZWL$3,750 respectively. In addition to the above risk allowances, health workers continue to receive the US$75 denominated risk allowance which is paid in local currency at the prevailing rate. To note that whereas payment of this allowance was supposed to end by December 2020, this has been extended into January 2021 and beyond guided by progress in control of the COVID-19 epidemic.

All categories of health workers assigned to continuously work in the RedZone treatment wards are entitled to a monthly RedZone allowance of ZWL$6,000 (in lieu of the High Risk allowance of ZWL$3,750). This outstanding allowance will start being paid together with the January 2021 salary, back paid to when it was introduced.

In April 2020, the government introduced a COVID-19 related insurance scheme, for which health workers are eligible, consisting of the following elements:

- Paid sick leave extended from 90 days to 6 months on full pay
- All health workers who test positive (PCR) for COVID-19 receive a once off payment of USD$650 for Grade E5 and below and US$1,000 for F Grades, paid in local currency at the prevailing rate.
- Government to pay for all short falls on medical aid for health workers afflicted by COVID-19
- Government institutions to provide the necessary medicines, free of charge, for staff on treatment for COVID-19
- In the event that a health worker dies of a COVID-19, beneficiaries (estate) will receive the once off payment of either the US$650 or USD 1000 equivalent in local currency, depending on the grade of the worker – and all other funeral benefits that already existed for civil servants.

Additional Health Workforce

In view of the resurgence of the COVID-19 epidemic and the pressure exerted on the health system, the Health Service Board and Ministry of Health and Child Care have put in place a number of initiatives which include:

- Deployment of 49 Junior Medical Doctors to the 5 Central Hospitals
- With Treasury authority the Health Services Board is employing an additional 500 nurses. The available 200 nurses have already been deployed as follows – 80 to Parirenyatwa (30 of whom will support Wilkins Infectious Hospital), 70 to United Bulawayo Hospitals (20 to support Thorngrove Infectious Hospital) and 50 to Matabeleland South (support surge from Border crossings).
The outstanding 300 will be deployed once information on those that passed their examinations and registration by the Nursing Council is available.

This is in addition to the allocation of additional health workers to these institutions during the first wave of the epidemic whereby 8 Medical Doctors, 54 Nurses, 24 Nurse aides and 24 General Hands were allocated to Parirenyatwa Hospital and for United Bulawayo Hospital which was allocated 7 medical doctors, 28 Nurses, 12 Nurse Aides and 12 General Hands.

Ensuring a Conducive Work Environment

- Government is sparing no effort in encouraging local manufacturers to ramp up the production of PPE and improving efficiencies in the importation of the PPE.
- The Procurement Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe has granted the Ministry of Health and Child Care authority to shorten the bidding time for the procurement of medical Oxygen from the current 20 days to 2 days.

COVID-19 Infection of Health Workers

- The Health Service Board and Ministry of Health and Child Care note with great concern that of close to 50,000 members of the health service, 1,547 health workers are reported to have tested positive for infection by COVID-19, and that 7 are reported to have succumbed to the infection.
- The Board does not take this lightly and puts every effort to ensure that Members of the Health Service are appropriately trained in and practice Infection Prevention and Control Procedures, are provided with adequate and appropriate PPE and receive appropriate Counselling and support services.
- The Health Service Board and the Ministry of Health and Child Care are currently processing payments of the once off risk allowances for health workers that have tested positive for COVID-19, as well as the other related benefits the workers are entitled to, subject to funding being made available by Treasury.

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EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

HEALTH SERVICE BOARD