

PRESS RELEASE

Persistent contraceptives stockouts across the country weigh on health care system

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Investigations conducted by the Stop Stock Outs Project (SSP) reveal that health facilities across Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape have reported ongoing stockouts of contraception medications, including *Nur-isterate*, *Ovral*, *Triphasil* and *Depo Provera*. To avert further erosion of the right to sexual reproductive health, the SSP is calling on the National Department of Health (NDoH) to review the supply chain management and distribution procedures of contraceptives and produce a comprehensive remediation plan that prioritises contracts with reliable suppliers who can ensure an uninterrupted supply of contraceptives to facilities.

“Health facilities in affected provinces are increasingly reporting stockouts of more than one kind of contraception,” says Dr Indira Govender of Rural Doctors Association of Southern Africa, an SSP consortium member. “*Depo Provera* is the most widely used and easy to administer contraceptive in public facilities across South Africa, and the ongoing stockouts leave many women who depend on it at a loss, without alternatives.”

SSP raised the alarm over contraceptives stockouts in 2018, yet the problem persists. Despite being well informed about stockouts, the Department of Health is failing to address the issues.

“The impact of a lack of access to contraceptives places women at increased risk of unwanted pregnancy, economic stress and compromises their psychological wellbeing. All of which undermines reproductive and contraceptive health rights,” explains Govender.

Furthermore, there is a shortage of *Implanon* in Ekurhuleni, Tshwane, in the City of Johannesburg and the Sedibeng District as a result of the gap caused by stockout of injectable contraceptives and pills.

“We have also observed a shortage of *Mifegyne* in some of the facilities that offer safe termination of pregnancy services,” says SSP Manager, Kopano Klass.

In North West Province, SSP partner organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) has been supplying the Department of Health with a limited quantity of intra-uterine devices and emergency contraceptives, but this is not a sustainable intervention. Ultimately, the responsibility to procure medications remains the duty of the provincial and national health departments

In addition to reviewing and improving the current systems of supply chain management and distribution for contraceptives, SSP is calling for the development of a standard referral guideline to be circulated to health facilities, that describes how clinical staff must handle stockouts and appropriately advise women who are unable to access the contraceptive of their choice at the initial point of service.

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For more information and comments please contact: Kopano Klaas on 083 347 4845 or email kopano@stockouts.org

Editor's notes

The Stop Stockouts Project (SSP) is a consortium of six civil society organisations dedicated to assisting the thousands of people whose lives are threatened by the chronic shortages of essential medicines and children's vaccines in South Africa. The project was established in 2013, following the Mthatha depot crisis in the Eastern Cape in 2013.

The project was initiated by SECTION27, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Rural Health Advocacy Project (RHAP), Rural Health Doctors Association of Southern Africa (RuDASA), the Southern African HIV Clinician Society and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) who recognised that monitoring drug stockouts and shortages of essential medicines in primary health care facilities was a national priority.

As a civil society organisation partner and stakeholder in the delivery of health services, SSP strives to have stockouts resolved so that patients benefit from efficient service delivery.

Our health system must serve all who live in South Africa and provide adequate medication in a timely fashion. SSP, therefore, urges anyone who has been affected by medicine shortages in the public sector to send a, please call me, SMS, or WhatsApp message, or phone the hotline on 0848557867 or send an email to report@stockouts.org.