

PRESS STATEMENT

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“SSP alarmed at second line ARV and contraceptive shortages across South Africa

The Stop Stockouts Project (SSP) notes with deep concern the continued stockouts of second line Anti-Retroviral (ARV) therapy and shortages of contraceptives across the country. These stockouts have been unresolved since the second half of last year and the situation has now escalated into a crisis. The failure of relevant stakeholders to act swiftly will put scores of lives at risk.

Second line ARVs

SSP initially received reports of a shortage of the second line regimen from facilities in Ekurhuleni. A patient, who did not wish to be identified, reported that there was no alternative in several clinics in her area.

“She is frantic with worry about developing resistance and her viral load becoming detectable, meaning that she could pass on the virus. In tears, she calls the helpline daily, begging for us to help her,” said Kopano Klaas, Project Co-ordinator at SSP.

Since then SSP has received information of stockouts of second line ARV drugs in Free State, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.

Efforts to establish why there are stockouts have been unsuccessful.

“A supplier responsible for delivery informed us on 29 May 2019 that they have delivered over 1 million additional packs of second line ARVs, when only 128 000 packs were ordered by National Department of Health late last year. The National Department of Health contends that there should only be approximately 100 000 people on the second line regimen,” said Klaas.

In addition, SSP has been informed that the current second line regimen is in the process of being phased out and will shortly no longer be available as supply has been reduced to 58 000 packs in the new tender. This is very concerning, because while some people may be able to be switched back to first line there are still a significant number of people who will need to continue on the second line.

“We do not know what plan has been put in place for a second line regimen to fill the gap but strongly feel that there needs to be time for manufacturers to build supply or there will be stockouts for the remainder of this, and next year,” said Klaas.

Contraceptive shortages

SSP is further alarmed by the repeated stockouts of both kinds of injectable as well as oral contraceptives.

“According to our information, only one company was appointed to deliver the injectable contraceptive and due to the late notice of the tender award, the company has not been able to meet the supply backlog,” Klaas said.

Consequently, provincial depots are required to order through other companies (not on tender) if they need additional injectable, and oral, contraceptives. However, this does not appear to be happening. There do not seem to be sufficient suppliers, and many companies have stopped applying for the tender due to late payments and payment defaults.

Stockouts of injectable and oral contraceptives mean that the only contraception available currently is Implanon, the contraceptive implant device. Implanon can be ineffective in preventing pregnancy in women living with HIV who are on efavirenz-containing regimens, which currently includes most people on first line ART.

This contraceptive stockout crisis is particularly worrying as the National Department of Health gears up to begin the transition from the efavirenz-containing first line regimen to a dolutegravir-containing first line regimen. Dolutegravir is a much more robust and forgiving medicine, but women of childbearing age should have a safe and reliable supply of contraceptives available when on dolutegravir due to potential risks when falling pregnant.

“The SSP reports in to District, Provincial and National Departments of Health staff on a daily basis, but they seem to know as much or as little as we do. Surely someone needs to account to the scores of patients, who are travelling long distances to collect their medication, having to take a day off work to do so, only to be turned away when they get there?” Klaas says. He concluded: “Patients are at risk of defaulting on their treatment and increasing the potential of infecting their partners while women risk unwanted pregnancies. We call on the relevant authorities to act swiftly to protect lives.

The SSP urges anyone who has been affected by medicine shortages or stockouts to call the hotline on **084 855 7867**.

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The Stop Stockouts Project is a consortium monitoring and reporting on shortages and stockouts of essential medicines, childhood vaccines and chronic medicines in South Africa.

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The views reflected in this press statement do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.



Explanatory note: Stop Stockouts Project is a consortium made up of 6 member organisations (SAHCS, MSF, TAC, SECTION27, RuDASA, RHAP), currently funded by a grant from the European Union

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