

Stories from the field

On 15 March 2020, Somalia received 300 000 doses of Oxford AstraZeneca vaccines from the COVAX Facility to protect frontline workers and elderly people with chronic health conditions from COVID-19. The World Health Organization (WHO) hears back from some of the first people vaccinated in the capital city.

Spread the message – get vaccinated and keep safe



As a medical doctor working along the front lines of public health service, Dr Aweis Olow Hassan received his vaccine against coronavirus disease (COVID-19) at Banadir Hospital on 16 March 2021. Dr Hassan serves as a medical doctor and stabilization centre supervisor at the hospital. On a regular day at work, Dr Hassan spends his time visiting patients and supervising staff at the nutrition unit, while concurrently training staff and medical students on the job.

As part of his hospital's infection prevention and control committee, for the last year, Dr Hassan avoided being infected by COVID-19 thanks to his diligence in wearing a face mask and handwashing. It also helped that the team at the Banadir Hospital ensured they had handwashing stations at the entrance of the facility and in every ward.

At first, when Dr Hassan used to wear a face mask outside of the hospital, people would stare at him, shouting, "Corona! Corona! Corona!"

He adds people didn't believe how serious COVID-19 could be, and thought it was just a common cold. But when some families started to lose their loved ones, they realized how big this was. With the ongoing wave though, Dr Hassan feels more and more Somalis are wearing face masks and taking precautions.

Dr Hassan, who is a researcher, actively follows news from the World Health Organization (WHO), United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and European Medical Agency (EMA) online. Well before Somalia had access to COVID-19 vaccines, Dr Hassan often wondered how he could get vaccinated against COVID-19.

He is dismayed that the rumour mill continues to churn out misinformation though. He explains that he would like to assure people that the clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccine were conducted extensively, and are now over. Now, there is confidence in the safety of vaccines being offered. Even the rumours about blood clotting have been cleared by studies.

"One thing is for certain," says Dr Hassan, "COVID-19 can kill and vaccines do not. On the contrary, vaccines save lives. It's as simple as that."

For now, Dr Hassan requests all people who receives vaccines to share their experiences on social media and within their communities.

"A lot of my medical colleagues stood back and waited for me to get vaccinated first. Once they saw I had no side-effects, apart from a sore arm – which is a common side-effect – my colleagues rushed to get the vaccine," says Dr Hassan, proud of being a positive influence on

his peers.

“Everyone should take the vaccine for the sake of their own safety and that of the community,” adds Dr Hassan. “Sadly, we are losing our golden grandfathers, grandmothers and parents to COVID-19. Please let’s all wear masks, wash hands and take vaccines. I would like to share my messages that I spread and would like others to use them too:

Before vaccines - #*Waan qaadanayaa* talaalka (I will be vaccinated) and after vaccinations - #*Waan qaatay talaalka ee fadlan adigana qaado* (I took the vaccine and you should go get vaccinated).

Access improving slowly but health equity a big challenge



Our turn to give back and vaccinate our parents



People vaccinated so far in Somalia

As of 21 March, 1267 people had received COVID-19 vaccines in 4 of Banadir’s main hospitals – the Banadir Hospital, De Martino Hospital, Dr Sumait Hospital, and the Racip Tayip Hospital. Overall, 393 health workers, 129 municipal staff, 147 teachers, 111 members of the police force, 32 staff from points of entry and 455 elderly people received vaccines without any experiencing any major issues.

Meanwhile, vaccination teams in 17 of Banadir’s districts were trained in delivering and storing COVID-19 vaccinations. Additional health workers are also being trained in other states of the country.

From 21 March onwards, COVID-19 vaccinations started to roll out for frontline workers and elderly people with chronic conditions in Somaliland and Puntland.

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