



PR#434

PRESS RELEASE

Belize Receives Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine

Belmopan. August 27, 2021. 2:25 p.m.

The Government of Belize on August 26, 2021, received a shipment of 132,000 doses of Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines acquired through UNICEF's partnership with the African Union's African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT).

Hon. Michel Chebat, Minister of Health & Wellness, expressed gratitude for the partnership and realization of this arrival of vaccines for the people of Belize. He said, *"We continue to be grateful for additional options of vaccines to support our countrywide vaccine drives."* The Minister reiterated the call for persons to get vaccinated at the vaccine sites countrywide and also to adhere to the guidelines emphasized at every opportunity, especially due to new variants that have been identified in Belize.

Alison Parker, UNICEF Representative to Belize, expressed the organization's commitment to supporting the government to optimize vaccine uptake and achieve herd immunity to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Ms. Parker explained that, *"it is crucial to ensure equitable access to vaccines to increase the level of protection amongst the populace, and fast track the return to normalcy that is imperative to the livelihoods and survival of families and children of Belize. Getting vaccinated whilst ensuring continued adherence to preventive protocols remain the surest way to end the pandemic. UNICEF, with the support of international partners like AVAT, will continue to advocate and mobilize resources to aid in Belize's COVID-19 recovery process."*

Dr. Melissa Diaz Musa, deputy regional manager at the Central Health Region, and Ms. Paulette Wade, monitoring and evaluation officer, UNICEF Belize, received the vaccines upon arrival at the Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport.

The African Union (AU), a continental union consisting of 55 member states, organised a COVID-19 vaccine purchasing mechanism to deliver 400 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to the African continent in collaboration with Johnson & Johnson (Janssen). The AU member states, through AVAT, has extended access to countries in the CARICOM region that have subscribed to this initiative. Belize benefits from this partnership through the acquisition of the additional vaccines to support the country's vaccination deployment.

The Ministry of Health & Wellness reiterates the call for persons to get vaccinated. The public is reminded that even after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, persons are to continue to wear masks properly in public, maintain physical distancing, and wash and sanitize hands often. Please call the ministry's hotline at 0-800-664-2273 for more information if needed.

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