

Statement on Denial of Childhood Vaccines to Non-Citizen Children in South Africa

20 August 2025

The South African Paediatric Association (SAPA) is deeply concerned by reports that children of foreign nationals, including those that are undocumented, are being denied access to routine childhood immunisations at primary healthcare clinics in South Africa.

SAPA unequivocally condemns this practice. It is not only a moral and ethical failure to withhold lifesaving vaccines from children based on their nationality or documentation status, but it also undermines public health for all who live in South Africa.

Vaccines are among the most effective tools we have to prevent serious childhood illness and death. Excluding any group of children from vaccination programmes increases the risk of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles, polio, and whooping cough. These diseases do not discriminate by citizenship. Failure to vaccinate even a small proportion of children weakens herd immunity, thereby endangering all children and communities across the country.

South Africa has a proud history of prioritising the health and rights of children. Denying access to vaccination contravenes the principles enshrined in the Constitution, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and our obligations under international and regional human rights law.

SAPA calls on the National Department of Health and all provincial health authorities to:

- Urgently ensure that all children, regardless of nationality or documentation, have equitable access to vaccines.
- Issue clear directives to healthcare workers that vaccination is a right for every child within South Africa's borders.
- Reaffirm South Africa's commitment to the Expanded Programme on Immunisation as a cornerstone of child health and epidemic prevention.

Protecting children through vaccination is a shared responsibility. No child of any age should be left vulnerable to preventable disease because of where they were born or their parents' immigration status.

The health of every child matters. Protecting one child protects all.

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