

'No jabs, no job': Fiji to make vaccine compulsory

July 9 2021

Fiji has announced plans to make the coronavirus vaccine compulsory for all workers as it battles a runaway outbreak of the Delta variant, with the prime minister issuing a blunt message: "no jabs, no job".

Frank Bainimarama said all public servants in the South Pacific nation of 930,000 must go on leave if they have not had their first injection by August 15 and would be dismissed if they did not receive their second by November 1.

Private sector employees must have their first jab by August 1, with individuals facing hefty fines if they fail to comply and companies threatened with being shut down.

"No jabs, no job—that is what the science tells us is safest and that is now the policy of the government and enforced through law," Bainimarama said in a national address late Thursday.

The hardline policy comes amid government frustration at the widespread flouting of virus safety measures such as social distancing and wearing masks, blamed in part for a huge spike in infections.

Until April, Fiji had recorded no community cases for a year but a quarantine breach saw the highly contagious Delta variant, first detected in India, rapidly gain a foothold, with the country now recording 700-plus new cases a day.

'Reckless rule-breakers'

The under-resourced health system has been stretched to breaking point, with the country's largest hospital in Suva this week saying its mortuary was at capacity and urging the families of virus victims to collect their loved ones.

Bainimarama has resisted calls to lock down the entire country, citing the [economic cost](#) and the practicalities of enforcing such a move in densely-populated squatter settlements.

"A hard lockdown, as some are calling for, cannot be strictly enforced everywhere in Fiji and our experts tell us it would not kill off the virus," he said.

"But it would kill jobs and it could kill our country's future."

Instead, Bainimarama has imposed localised lockdowns in infection hotspots, including the capital Suva, while rolling out the Astra Zeneca [vaccine](#).

While almost 340,000 adults have received their first injection, Bainimarama said online misinformation was discouraging some people, assuring them he had experienced no [serious side effects](#) from the inoculation.

"I have not been magnetised or micro-chipped by the vaccine, I have not received the mark of the beast or any other creature—the vaccine does not do that to anyone," he said.

The rugby-mad country's national team has thrown its weight behind the inoculation drive and will wear shirts emblazoned with the message "vaccinate Fiji", rather than their sponsor's logo, during their two-Test

series against New Zealand starting this weekend.

Bainimarama said spot fines were being introduced for "reckless rule-breakers" who did not wear masks, attended social gatherings or violated quarantine orders.

Australia's minister for international development and the Pacific, Zed Seselja, told AFP on Friday that his country had delivered 70,000 more doses to Fiji in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to around 400,000.

He vowed Australia would "continue to up our effort when it comes to sharing vaccines in the region. I expect it will continue to ramp up right throughout this year."

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