

# Covid-19 survivor recounts 'surreal' experience

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by Charmaine Ngatjiheue

**A YOUNG man who recovered from Covid-19, Xavier Neidel, says finding out about his positive diagnosis felt surreal.**

The 21-year-old is a postgraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa.

Neidel, who already holds a bachelor's degree in accounting science, is currently pursuing a certificate in the theory of accounting, a postgraduate qualification.

Neidel was forced to immediately return to Namibia after the university announced the suspension of all contact lessons and face-to-face interactions, and ordered students to

vacate the premises as the South African government announced the closure of its borders.

The student, who lives in Windhoek, first appeared on MTC Namibia's social media platforms, recounting his story following his recovery. After sharing his story, Neidel says he was stigmatised.

## **SYMPTOMS**

Speaking to *The Namibian* earlier this week, Neidel said he first experienced mild and infrequent Covid-19 symptoms on 14 March, while on the university's premises in South Africa. He was skeptical about going for testing since he had no travel history, and South Africa was not considered high risk at the time.

"I had experienced a runny nose, a sore throat and a dry, persistent cough. At first, I ignored the symptoms due to my lack of international travel or any contact with a confirmed positive case.

"The week before, a medical student at my university had tested positive for the virus and I was shocked to later found out that the student lived in my residence," he said.

His symptoms persisted, which prompted him to get tested on 17 March. He had to wait two days to receive the results.

While awaiting his results, the university called on students to vacate the residence, giving them three days.

"As an international student, I had no place to go but home while still waiting for my results. I booked my flight for 20 March. I alerted my parents and they prepared the house for my self-isolation till I knew the result.

"The day I flew, I had no symptoms but I took the necessary precautions and wore gloves and a surgical mask to ensure I don't spread the virus further, if I was positive. My room was designated for my isolation," he said.

Neidel's family, aware of the risks involved, took the necessary precautions and their tests results came back negative.

## **POSITIVE DIAGNOSIS**

On 23 March, three days after returning to Namibia, Neidel's doctor in South Africa informed him of his positive result. Recalling that day, Neidel said he was overwhelmed with "shock" and disbelief.

"We contacted the local authorities (in Windhoek) about my status and they acted promptly. I spent the majority of the time in self- isolation in my room until an ambulance arrived at my house to take me to the isolation facility which is situated at the side of the airport," he said.

## **ISOLATION FACILITY**

The recovered patient explained that he had his own room with ablution facilities while at the isolation facility, but felt a bit depressed as he and other patients were not allowed to leave their rooms.

Neidel said he had to make the best of the situation and made friends with staff members and other patients.

“The centre itself is very accommodating for the purpose. The virus has no cure and treatment is based on symptoms. I had medicine for a dry cough and flu symptoms, but most importantly, I had immune boosters and vitamin C. The immune boosters were the first thing I had every morning to ensure I got the right amount of vitamins and I took a vitamin C before sleeping every night.

"During the first days, my symptoms subsided as I was taking my medicine. However, my mental health played a role in my recovery as well. Due to my fear and anxiety peaking, I got more sick, but with the support and love from my family and friends, I eventually changed my attitude," he said.

With a change in attitude and the end goal being recovery, Neidel had to be tested twice to confirm his Covid-19-negative status.

“To be discharged and declared that I'm recovered, I needed to have two consecutive tests that are negative. In total, I took the test three times, the first [was] positive and the last two negative. The first negative had me ecstatic as I knew this was a good sign and that I must be doing something right.

"When I got the results for my second negative test, I remember jumping up and down in that room of mine," Neidel added.

Neidel's mother, Florence Kazembe, said the whole ordeal was a very difficult time for the family, but added that they had to accept it.

“As parents, we believe in the bio-psycho-social model of patient management. Therefore, we put a lot of emphasis [on his mental well-being] and ensured that he had a private psychologist who checked in with him on a daily basis.

"We had to re-inspire ourselves and our son on a daily basis. We have a lot of faith. However, stigma and social media keyboard warriors are a concern to date," she said.

Clinical psychologist Käthe Burkhardt said for Neidel and other patients who have recovered from Covid-19, the whole ordeal is difficult to deal with pre- and post-Covid-19.

Burkhardt said the stigma makes it worse, adding that patients are victims to the global virus, but even after recovery, they can still be stigmatised.

“Recovered patients should turn to people such as their family members for support while dealing with the trauma because the whole experience is traumatising. Patients can also do things to rebuild themselves and their self-esteem. Isolation in itself is hard on patients and they need all the support they can get. The public should not stigmatise patients but rather support them and understand their situation,” she said.

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