

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**STATEMENT BY DR. KALUMBI SHANGULA ON THE OCCASION OF THE 28th
COVID-19 BRIEFING: ANNOUNCEMENT OF AMENDMENTS TO PUBLIC
HEALTH COVID 19 GENERAL REGULATIONS: PUBLIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH ACT, 2015: MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES.**

28th MAY 2021

**STATE HOUSE
WINDHOEK**

**Check Against Delivery.*

Hon Ministers
Senior officials
Members of the Media
Fellow Namibians

1. As the nation has been informed, our President, H. E. Dr Hage G. Geingob and the First Lady Monica Geingos, tested positive for COVID-19. For this reason, the President will not participate in this briefing today. He has thus mandated me to lead the briefing this morning. Both the President and the First Lady are recovering well. The nation is implored to remain calm as there are no cause for concern. We wish them well and a speedy recovery.
2. This Briefing is taking place against the backdrop of the increasing number of new COVID-19 cases, increasing hospitalizations, and deaths. The situation on the COVID-19 front therefore require greater co-operation amongst all of us. It requires greater compliance with the public health measures that have been proven to work and stem the spread of infections around the world.
3. It has been said before, and I will say it again here today, that the tools to suppress the spread of this pandemic are in our own hands. What we need to do is to comply with the public health measures, especially in terms of avoiding and staying away from large public gatherings, wearing our face masks correctly, maintaining appropriate physical distance and washing our hands with soap and clean water or sanitizing with alcohol-based hand rubs. I must emphasize that the current surge in cases being experienced in Namibia is mainly fueled by the fact that many of our people are not complying with the public health regulations especially when it comes to public gatherings.
4. What we have observed over the past months is that members of the public are flagrantly disobeying the regulations and putting families, our communities and our country at risk. The increasing number of cases exert pressure on our public health system. As part of our national preparedness and response, we have put in place measures such as isolation facilities and intensive care facilities to care for those who fall ill due to COVID-19. We have bought various medical equipment such as ventilators and monitors to support health care services. We have recruited temporary and permanent staff to boost existing capacity. We have engaged in public education and awareness raising activities to inform the public about the dangers of COVID-19. This has included bringing on board and involving elected officials, community and spiritual leaders and other stakeholders.
5. However, these efforts will not have the desired effect if we do not do our part. Our nation has a stark choice to make. We must decide to change our behaviour and outlook, collectively and individually, and take this pandemic seriously. Or we persist in the current way of doing things and face further pain, suffering and death. The choice is ours and I trust that going forward, the nation will do the right thing. On our part as Government, we will not tire and we will not relent in imploring the public to behave correctly and thereby suppress the spread of new infections and return our country to normalcy.

6. Currently, new COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths are being reported daily almost in all Regions around the country. As we all know, the current public health measures took effect on the 1 May 2021. For the past twenty-seven (27) days Namibia has recorded five thousand four hundred and ninety-seven (5 497) new Covid-19 cases. This is an average of two hundred and four (204) cases per day. During the same period, one hundred and fifty-two (152) Covid-19 deaths were recorded, averaging six (6) deaths per day! If this trend is not arrested, by a mere extrapolation, Namibia will record forty-four thousand four hundred and seventy-two (44 472) new Covid-19 cases and one thousand three hundred and eight (1 308) new Covid-19 deaths by the end of the year.
7. The increasing number of persons experiencing severe illnesses means that space in our isolations facilities and intensive care units, in both the public and private sectors, are becoming full. The pressure on the oxygen supply infrastructure has also increased. It is therefore important that our people protect themselves from infection so that they do not become sick and end up needing hospitalization.
8. One of the important weapons in our arsenal against COVID-19 is getting our people vaccinated. Vaccination protects individuals against contracting the virus, protect those who have contracted the virus against severe illness and minimize the occurrence of death. It is therefore critically important for all eligible persons to get vaccinated. We have established 383 vaccination sites in different health districts around the country where our people can receive the vaccine. Vaccination is voluntary. It is free. Members of the public can choose either Sinopharm or Astra Zeneca vaccines. They are equally safe and effective. I invite you to get vaccinated.
9. You may recall that we launched our vaccination campaign on the 19 March 2021 in Khomas and Erongo, targeting priority population categories during Phase One. On the 19 April 2021, we launched Phase Two vaccination campaign covering the whole country. By the 27 May 2021, sixty-five thousand and thirty-seven (65 037) persons have been vaccinated. The regions with the lowest vaccine uptake are Zambezi, Oshikoto, Omusati and Oshana. Disinformation and conspiracy theories that are being propagated over social media and other platforms are responsible for the observed vaccine hesitancy. The government will redouble its efforts to fight this phenomenon, including invoking Section 32 of the Public and Environmental Act of 2015 with regard to offences and penalties.
10. With respect to a Namibian who passed away on 17th May, the same day he received the first vaccine dose, I wish to inform that the postmortem examination has been completed. However, some pathological examinations results are still pending. The definite cause of death will be announced once the outstanding results become available.
11. As we had been reporting at previous COVID-19 Briefings, Namibia has done remarkably well on the COVID-19 testing front. To date, Namibia has tested a total of 426,874 samples for COVID-19 at eleven (11) certified SARS CoV2 testing laboratories around the country. This achievement has put Namibia in second place, just after South Africa, of countries that have conducted the highest number of COVID-19 tests on the African Continent. The more people we test for COVID-19, the more we are able to detect new

cases of COVID-19 in the community that need to be rapidly isolated and contact traced, in order to break chains of transmission in our communities. We are very fortunate to have established such laboratory capacity in Namibia, capacity that also includes the ability to conduct genome sequencing to identify and respond to the emerging threat of COVID-19 variants, and we shall continue to build onto that capacity.

12. The Public Health Regulations that came into force on 1 May 2021 will expire at midnight on 31st May 2021. Taking into account the changing situation of COVID-19 pandemic in the country, amended Public Health Regulations will come into force at 00:00 on 1st June 2021. The amendments made to the Regulations are stipulated hereunder. Most of the regulations remain unchanged. I will focus on those regulations where changes have been effected as well as those that need to be strengthened.

The Public Health Covid-19 General Regulation as published in government Gazette No 7522 of the 30 April 2021 remain in force. The following regulations have been amended and or strengthened.

Regulation No. 2: Application of Regulations

The regulations will enter into force for a period of 4 weeks, starting on the 1st June 2021 until the 30th June 2021.

Regulation No. 4: Gatherings

Authorized public gatherings will be reduced from the current 100 to a maximum of 50 people per event, both indoors and outdoors. Public gatherings, including but not limited to weddings, funerals and church events have been shown to be responsible for many infections.

Participants in authorized training activities and workshops are encouraged, as far as possible, to participate via virtual platforms.

Regulation No.5: Curfew

Curfew time will be between 22:00-04:00 as is currently the case. Curfew remains an important tool in containing infection. Curfew is imposed in such a way that it causes minimal inconveniences to the individuals. It is set for the time when people are expected to be sleeping in any case.

Regulation No. 10: Certain Activities, Sporting events

Spectators at sporting events are limited to 50 persons per event. It is mandatory for the spectators to comply with public health measures at all time. Contact sports are prohibited.

Regulation No. 11: Restrictions relating to entry into Namibia:

All travelers entering Namibia are required to produce a SARS COV-2 PCR negative result (valid for 7 days from the date of specimen collection). Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Test results will no longer be accepted for entry into Namibia at Ports of Entry.

For all travelers coming from or transiting through hotspot regions such as India, are required to repeat the SARS CoV2 PCR test 7 days after arrival in Namibia.

Regulation No. 12: Quarantine and COVID-19 testing

Namibian students studying abroad will be exempt from bearing the cost of COVID-19 tests upon departure from Namibia for academic purposes, provided that adequate proof is presented.

Travelers returning to Namibia within seven days will not be required to present a negative SARS COV-2 PCR test result from the country of departure.

Any person presenting fake SARS COV-2 PCR test results will be prosecuted. Any non-Namibian who presents fake or forged SARS COV-2 PCR test results to an official at any Port of Entry will be denied entry into Namibia and will be deported at own cost.

Regulation No. 13: Public transport

This regulation remains unchanged. However, the public transport sector is implored to strengthen compliance with public health measures in order to suppress the spread of COVID-19 infections.

Regulation No. 19: COVID-19 related deaths and Burials

Regulation 19 of the Public Health Covid-19 General Regulations remains unchanged. The embalming of human remains of persons who died of notifiable infectious diseases is prohibited.

Posthumous re-swabbing of human remains of persons who die of COVID-19 is prohibited, except in specified circumstances as determined by authorized person. It should however be noted that COVID-19 infection is NOT a valid reason to forgo a post-mortem/autopsy examination if it is indicated.

Burial attendees must disperse immediately after the burial service. The congregation of attendees at the residence of the deceased or any other place for the purpose of meals is strongly discouraged. Such gatherings offer fertile ground for Covid-19 transmission.

13. Notwithstanding these measures, Namibia remains one of the few countries that has liberal control measures against Covid-19 pandemic. We have been urged by fellow Namibians to impose stricter measures in order to contain further transmission and save lives. However, with the measures that I have announced we sought to strike a fine balance in order to preserve lives and livelihood and grow the economy. We are striving to have our country assume a semblance of normalcy. I therefore implore the Namibians to show their unreserved support and cooperation with these measures. Our preference is not to enforce the law, but to rely on citizens voluntary compliance. In the absence of the latter, the law will have to be imposed.
14. As I said at the 27th COVID-19 Briefing, the measures being put in place are difficult, but they are necessary. They will help us to suppress the further spread of new infections,

severe illnesses and avoidable deaths. They will help us to protect our frontline workers who put their lives on the line on a daily basis to help those who cannot help themselves. Everything we do must be aimed at ensuring that our health system is not overwhelmed by the pandemic.

15. I once again call on the nation to stand together against the COVID-19 pandemic.

-END-