

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**STATEMENT BY DR. KALUMBI SHANGULA ON THE OCCASION OF THE 27th
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.**

29 APRIL 2021

**STATE HOUSE
WINDHOEK**

**Check Against Delivery.*

Fellow Namibians!

I have been mandated by H. E. Dr Hage G. Geingob to lead the 27th Covid-19 Public Briefing. H. E. The President is on a working visit outside Windhoek.

1. As it is happening in other countries around the world, the fight against COVID-19 pandemic in Namibia continues. In order for our nation to prevail against this threat, we have added more ammunition to our arsenal in the form of the COVID-19 vaccines. It is encouraging that more and more Namibians are coming forward to get vaccinated. The Ministry of Health and Social Services has established a total of **383** COVID-19 vaccination sites in different health districts around the country. Of these, **181** are fixed, **154** are mobile and **48** are outreach points. So far, more than **20 315** persons have already been vaccinated around the country following the roll out of the nationwide vaccination programme. This is indeed an encouraging positive public response. We call upon more Namibians to go and get vaccinated.
2. The vaccination programme is being rolled out under the auspices of the existing Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), through which the Ministry has implemented vaccination campaigns in the past. This approach means that we do not have to create new structures and capacities to roll out the COVID-19 vaccination programme. Rather, we are harnessing existing knowledge, expertise, facilities and infrastructure already in place. In this manner, we are able to benefit from cost savings, administrative efficiencies, and logistical arrangements.
3. It has been reported that some individuals have been turned away from vaccination sites and denied vaccination because they did not have national identification documents. I wish to clarify that no eligible person should be turned away and denied vaccination. Persons without a National ID can be vouched for by another person with the National Identification Document, who knows him or her and receive COVID-19 vaccination. Also, documents such as health passports, Voters Registration Cards, documents from church authorities and driver's license may serve as identification documents.
4. In cases where none of these can be produced, a person without an identification document may simply provide their birth date, and if the birth date is unknown, the health workers will use the date of vaccination and the person's name for record purposes. Again, the nation should know that the vaccines are available for all Namibians and people residing in Namibia at no cost. We will continue to share this vital information as part of our public education and awareness raising campaigns on COVID-19 vaccination.
5. I reiterate that our national COVID-19 response and preparedness is informed and guided by the available scientific information and data. The experts and health care workers who are involved in the planning of our public health measures and health interventions continue to engage and consult with their counterparts around the world to ensure that our response is effective and produces the desired results.
6. In this context, all that we do as far as the response is concerned, we take into account the latest available data. Currently, the COVID-19 epidemiological trend in Namibia calls for

greater vigilance. It calls for all of us to take personal responsibility to suppress the spread of new infections. While our country has done relatively well, it will be self-defeating if we let our guard down now. It is pleasing that we continue to improve local laboratory testing capacity for COVID-19. In addition to bringing more laboratories on board, we have also established capacity for genome sequencing at the University of Namibia. Genome sequencing conducted at UNAM indicate that the Variant of Concern (VOC), initially discovered in South Africa (**B.1.351**), is present in 60% of the samples analysed in February. The Variant of Concern, **B.1.1.7** initially discovered in the UK was detected in three of the samples analysed. Going forward, we will utilize this scientific capacity as part of our national response and preparedness against COVID-19.

7. Namibia will do well to learn lessons from other countries, where the pandemic has overwhelmed health systems. The onus of responsibility rests upon all of us as a nation to prevent such horrific scenarios. We can do it by complying with the public health measures that have been put in place. We can do it by making the preventive and hygiene practices part and parcel of our daily lives. This is particularly important as we approach the winter season where people tend to be close together in close settings and where influenza illnesses tend to proliferate.
8. The central message has been and continues to be that, in all that we do, we must always aim to protect both the lives and livelihoods of our people as the rationale for our response. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various sectors of our economy is grave. Therefore, it is critical that we return our national economy on the trajectory of growth. It is for this reason that we continue to review the measures put in place cognizant of the fact that our society and our economy has been hurt by the impact of the pandemic.
9. At this occasion and before the expiry of the Public Health Regulations that came into force on the 1 April 2021, and which will expire at midnight on the 30 April 2021, I will share with the nation the amended measures to come into force at 00:00 on the 1 May 2021 and to lapse at midnight on the 31 May 2021. As I stated at this venue on 31st March 2021, the COVID-19 epidemiological curve has not shown a downward trajectory to the levels where we can say, our country is out of the woods, as far as COVID-19 infections, related illnesses and deaths are concerned. In other words, we are still far from sustainably flattening the curve.
10. Let me reiterate also again that at present, the number of new infections in our country remains high. Infections are being reported on a daily basis from all regions around the country. The Basic Reproductive Ratio (R_0), or the rate at which a single infection multiplies or give rise to other new infections, stands at 0.94 for the Epidemiological Week 16 or the week from 19th to 25th April 2021. For Epidemiological Week 15 (12th to 18th April), the Basic Reproductive Ratio (R_0) stood at 1.3. We have thus recorded a slight decrease in this figure. Ideally, the Basic Reproductive Ratio (R_0) should be less than one (1). Unfortunately, current data available indicates that COVID-19 transmission in our communities is continuing across the country.
11. It is from this vantage point that the National COVID-19 Dashboard Monitoring Team

and the National Health Emergency Management Committee made recommendations for public health measures that will come into force at midnight on Friday.

12. Where no change is announced, the Regulation remains in place and in force as earlier gazette under Regulation 233.

Regulation No 2: Application of regulations; duration

The regulation shall remain in force until the 31 May 2021.

Regulation No 3: Wearing of masks

Correct and mandatory wearing of masks remains part of the response. However, enforcement of compliance must be strengthened, with the involvement of community leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders and law enforcement officers.

Regulation No. 4: Public Gatherings, Curfew and measure related to education

Public gathering remains at 100 persons, both for indoor and outdoor gathering as per the current regulations. Measures related to education remain unchanged.

Curfew starts at 22:00 until 04:00 as per current regulations.

Regulation No. 4B: Education

Learners from Boarding Schools where active transmission of COVID-19 is taking place, will remain in the Boarding facilities.

Regulation No. 7A: Restrictions relating to sporting activities.

Spectators are allowed at sport events. However, the number of spectators shall not exceed 100 persons at any sport events and shall comply with COVID-19 protocols.

Regulation No. 8: Restrictions relating to entry into Namibia

A person who leaves Namibia for another country with a negative COVID-19 result and returns within the validity period of such test shall not be subjected to COVID-19 test upon returning to Namibia.

Regulation No. 9: Quarantine and COVID-19 testing

Namibians who return to the country without COVID-19 results are quarantined either in home quarantine or government supervised quarantine. All persons seeking home quarantine must submit an application for supervised home quarantine. Home quarantine is approved when the home environment is suitable for effective quarantine. Persons whose homes are unsuitable for home quarantine will be quarantined in identified facilities at own cost. The exemption for those who qualify still applies. All quarantined persons will be tested on Day 7 and released with negative results or placed in isolation when positive for COVID-19.

Regulation No. 10: Public transport

Public transport operators are permitted to load to full capacity. Enforcement of compliance with Regulations will be enhanced by authorities.

Regulation No. 11: Designation of COVID-19 response centres, quarantine facilities and isolation facilities

This regulation is amended by adding the following phrases: “any other place, premise, establishment or any other place other than health facilities”.

Regulation No. 13: Testing for COVID-19

The PCR test for COVID-19 remains unchanged. Negative Antigen Rapid Diagnostic results are recognised and accepted in Namibia. Only nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swabs are required and not blood specimen. A person tested for COVID-19 should not travel pending his or her results.

Regulation No. 16: COVID-19 related deaths and Burials

Only two persons are permitted to view a body of the deceased at a time for two minutes. They shall maintain all COVID-19 prevention measures.

The maximum number of people at the burial of COVID-19 death (s) remains the same as for other public gatherings. The law enforcers shall ensure compliance with this regulation taking into account the sensitivity towards the bereaved family.

Regarding persons transferred from one hospital to another in a different town, the Ministry of Health and Social Services is responsible for transporting the body back to the home town if the family cannot afford the undertaker services.

The body of a person who died as a result of Covid-19 complications outside Namibia shall be allowed in Namibia if cremated.

Regulation No. 28: Offences and penalties

Penalties in respect of non compliance with regulations are prescribed in the Public and Environmental Health Act of 2015. However, adherence or compliance by the public with the regulations are strongly encouraged but shall be strengthened by law enforcement officers.

13. These measures are difficult, but they are necessary. We need to have them in order to suppress the further spread of new infections, severe illnesses and avoidable deaths. For the sake of our country, our citizens and all those who find themselves within our borders, we must tolerate this temporary pain for future prosperity. Everything we do must be aimed at ensuring that our health system is not overwhelmed by the pandemic.
14. I once again call on the nation to stand together against the COVID-19 pandemic.

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