

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



THE PRESIDENCY

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB

**ON THE OCCASSION OF THE 30th COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING ON
THE NATIONAL RESPONSE MEASURES**

30 JUNE 2021

WINDHOEK

Check Against Delivery

Good Afternoon, Fellow Namibians.

I welcome you to this media briefing to inform the nation on the latest developments with regards to the COVID-19 situation in the country. Since the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Namibia, Government has waged a tireless war against an invisible and vicious enemy. We have taken decisive actions, aimed at protecting the Namibian population, with the belief that one life lost to COVID-19, is one life too many. Unfortunately, as in any war, many lives have been lost. I therefore, at the onset, offer my sincere and heartfelt condolences to the Namibian nation and specifically to the families of those who have lost their lives due to COVID-19.

I also take this moment to pay tribute to towering national leaders who have lost their lives to COVID-19. They are Dr. Ngarikutuke Tjiriange, Dr. Zedekia Ngavirue, Advocate Vekuii Rukoro, Leuietenants General John Mutwa and Lucas Hangula, Prof Mburumba Kerina and Gaob Eduardo Afrikaner, among many other stalwarts. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

I wish to express my utmost gratitude to the frontline personnel including our courageous Health Care Workers, Law Enforcement Agencies and public officials who risk their lives daily on the frontlines of this deadly pandemic. We have reached a critical moment in our fight against COVID-19 and we must wage this war, with the determined resolve to overcome - as a united front against a common enemy.

At this juncture, I call on Churches and faith-based-organisations to continue to uphold our nation in prayer, for the preservation of lives, healing and protection, in line with Psalm 121 verse 1, which reads "... Our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Trajectory of the Pandemic

New COVID-19 infections are rising exponentially and the country continues to record an increasingly high number of hospitalizations and deaths, across the country.

The number of new cases per day has more than tripled, since the first week of June, from an average 507 cases per day, to the current average of 1,798 cases per day. Over the past two weeks, a total of fifty-nine-thousand-and-fifteen (59,015) tests have been conducted, with a positivity rate of 41 percent. This means 4 out of every 10 people you interact with, in your day-to-day dealings, are likely to be COVID-19 positive. This rising level of exposure is of great concern, because of the highly transmissible nature of the virus.

Expert projections and simulation tools indicate that the rising incidence curve, during this Third Wave, is expected to peak around mid-August and may continue well until mid-September 2021. The darkest hour of the night, comes just before day-break. It is expected to get worse, before it becomes better. We must therefore do everything in our power to suppress the rate of transmission. Only you and I, can stop the further spread of this virus from ravaging our homes and communities.

Over the past 15 days, the Khomas region continues to record the highest number of new infections, with 42 percent of total cases in the country. The Erongo region recorded 12 percent of total infections, while the Otjozondjupa and Hardap regions recorded the third and fourth highest rate of new infections, at 7 percent, each. While the country recorded a 50 percent recovery rate over the last 15 days, the fatality rate has also risen sharply and the country has recorded the regrettable loss of 513 Namibian lives, in a period of just 15 days, due to COVID-19 or related illness. Notably, thirty-one (31) percent of fatalities occurred in the Khomas region, accounting for 158 deaths; and 12 percent in the Erongo, Hardap and Omaheke regions, accounting for 63, 63 and 61 deaths, respectively. Efforts to augment capacities and to respond to the needs of public health facilities, in adversely affected regions, are being intensified with the supply of essential consumables as well as human resources.

Health Sector Capacity

Government has used the time and resources, since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Namibia to strengthen the capacity of the health sector. Population testing is an important tool in determining the full extent of the pandemic. As at 29 June 2021, Namibia ranked 3rd in Africa, after Gabon and South Africa, with a testing coverage of 207 people tested, per 1,000 population.

There are clear indications that we now have the more aggressive Delta strain in our midst. However, this will be confirmed by scientists who are conducting genome sequencing in our labs, by Friday 02nd July. Investments are being intensified to strengthen the Health Sector across the country, to respond to the rising demand for beds and medical care for those who need it most.

At this point, I express sincere gratitude to the Private Sector who have pledged a total of 38,9 million Namibian Dollars in cash and more in-kind donations, towards the national response against COVID-19. I acknowledge contributions from the GIPF, Public Enterprises Forum, Namibia Breweries, Capricorn Group Namibia, Olthaver & List, Barloworld, NamDeb, First Rand Group DeBeers Marine, First National Bank of Namibia, Hollard, Pupkewitz Foundation, Old Mutual, Standard Bank and Recon Africa, to mention but a few. I thank every corporate and private citizen who has made a contribution towards our collective war against this threat to life and wellbeing. Let us continue to hold hands, to emerge victorious.

Prevention and Mitigation

With regard to measures aimed at prevention and mitigation, the Minister of Health will provide a more detailed briefing on vaccine stock levels in the country currently and the Estimated Times of Arrival for the consignments we have ordered.

Having recovered from COVID-19 myself, I am fully aware of the importance of being vaccinated against the disease. In this regard, my Medical Doctors will determine the appropriate vaccine and date on which I will receive my vaccination.

While vaccines are our most effective weapon in our arsenal against this disease, the old adage remains true, that "Prevention is better than cure." Now more than ever let us increase our level of personal vigilance and compliance to the Public Health Regulations, by practicing social and physical distancing, wearing a face mask in public spaces and maintaining hand hygiene, by washing and sanitizing frequently. In light of the rapidly rising number of cases in the country, Cabinet has decided to further strengthen the Public Health Regulations. The adjustments will come into force at midnight today, Wednesday 30 June 2021, for a period of fourteen (14) days until 15 July 2021. They are as follows:

1. The restriction of movement into and out of the Windhoek-Okahandja-Rehoboth Local Authority Areas has helped to contain the spread of the disease to other parts of the country. However, data confirms that the entire country is now characterized by "Widespread Community Transmission". In order to suppress further transmission of the virus, we are taking the difficult but necessary measure to extend the restriction in travel, to all regions. No travel will be permitted between regions, however travel within regions, will be permitted. Returning residents, essential service providers, emergency medical cases and transportation of human remains for burial purposes, will be permitted entry and exit into restricted regions, with the relevant permit.

I have always reiterated that the Health of Namibians remains the first priority and a balance must therefore be found in protecting life and livelihoods. While a full social and economic lockdown is proven to be effective in slowing transmission rates, it must be used sparingly, as it also spurs adverse effects to economy, business jobs and livelihoods. Under the current circumstances facing our country, this difficult step must be taken.

2. Public Gatherings as defined in the Regulations will be maintained at ten (10) persons per event.
3. The Curfew shall remain in force, however will be brought forward to commence from 21:00 to 04:00, daily.
4. Education:
 - a. All public and private schools (pre-primary up to grade 9), including Early Childhood Development Centres are currently on a special Winter Holiday until 26 July 2021.
 - b. Face-to-Face classes for Grades 10, 11 and 12 will be suspended countrywide, as part of the Winter Holiday, from the 1st until 16 July 2021.
 - c. Face-to-Face classes for Higher Education Institutions including Vocational Education Training Providers are also suspended for the period. All examinations for tertiary students will be undertaken online.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS:

5. Restrictions related to liquor: The sale of liquor is restricted from 09:00 to 18:00, Mondays to Thursdays, on take-away basis only, with exception of hospitality establishments such as guesthouses, hotels and similar establishments where residing guests may access on-site amenities. No alcohol outlet will be permitted to operate on Fridays to Sundays.
6. All food establishments are to serve food on take-way basis only, including restaurants, food vendors and kapana traders.

7. Hair Dressers, Tailors, Beauty Parlors will remain open, subject to strict adherence to Public Health Regulations. Not more than ten (10) persons will be permitted inside an establishment, at a time, and all persons must comply to the mandatory wearing of face masks and maintain physical distance of 1.5 meters or more.
8. Under the circumstances, Gambling Houses, Night Clubs, Gyms & Sports Clubs, public recreational spaces including playgrounds and swimming pools are all deemed to be high-risk and will not be permitted to operate.
9. Sports: All contact sports as defined in the Regulations, remain prohibited. For non-contact sports, no spectators will be permitted at live events.
10. Passenger Restrictions:
 - a. All road and air public transport operators will not be permitted to travel between regions, including long-haul operators and aircraft;
 - b. Within regions, motorists may only load passengers to half the capacity of the motor vehicle.
 - c. A special dispensation for tourists will be put in place. Further details will be follow.
11. Burials: Burials will be revised to take place within ten (10) days.

Fellow Namibians,

During this dark and sombre moment in our country's history, I call on all Namibians to uphold faith over fear, to show kindness, solidarity and compassion, and to cooperate with the authorities. As I have stated, winning this war requires all of us to make sacrifices and for that, I thank all Namibians for their cooperation.

Fellow Namibians, we are faced with a period of great difficulty but by showing the strength of our character, by showing a resilience against this unprecedented challenge, we shall overcome. Let us rise to the occasion and overcome COVID-19 with passion, sacrifice and struggle.

I appeal to all International Cooperating Partners, friendly Nations and to our Private Sector to continue mobilizing resources in support of Government's response, to combat further devastation by this disease.

I now call upon the Ministers of Health, Justice, Finance, Education and the Attorney General to elaborate on these and additional measures.

Thank you.