

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**STATEMENT BY DR KALUMBI SHANGULA, MP, MINISTER OF HEALTH AND
SOCIAL SERVICES ON OCCASION OF THE 32nd COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING ON
COVID-19 IN NAMIBIA.**

30 July 2021

**STATE HOUSE
WINDHOEK**

**Checked Against Delivery*

Your Excellency, Dr. Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia

Your Excellency, Dr. Nangolo Mbumba, Vice President

Rt Hon Prime Minister, Dr Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila

Honourable Ministers

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I start by thanking His Excellency Dr. Hage Geingob for his strong leadership and stewardship of the country during these difficult times. Following a period of sharp increases of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths, Namibia has started to observe a decline in the number of new infections. During the period of 16–29 July 2021, a total of 8 064 new COVID-19 case were reported compared to 19 157 cases reported between 30 June to 15 July 2021. However, the number of COVID deaths continues to be a matter of great concern. High death rates, albeit slightly reduced, are being reported, particularly among older age groups and persons with morbid conditions. During the period of 16–29 July 2021, a total number of 628 Namibian citizens have succumbed to COVID -19.
2. The decline in the number of reported cases correlates with the public health measures introduced and implemented to combat the spread and impact of COVID-19 pandemic. While this is a welcome development, the elevated positivity ratio, now averaging 30 percent and the high number of reported fatalities are indications that the country is still susceptible to sustained widespread community transmission, which requires and demands strict observance of the preventive public health measures by all of us.
3. In an effort to expand testing and reduce the turnaround time for laboratory results, the Ministry of Health and Social Services, with the support from partners, rolled-out Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Testing, following a determined algorithm. A total of 1 872 rapid tests have been conducted countrywide by 27 July 2021. Furthermore, Namibia continues to closely monitor the emergence of COVID-19 variants of concern through routine surveillance and genome sequencing conducted by University of Namibia and the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) in South Africa, working through the Namibia Instituter of Pathology (NIP). The capacity for genome sequencing in Namibia is further enhanced with the support received from Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention.
4. Namibia has also received contributions and support from several countries and organizations to strengthen our COVID-19 response and preparedness, especially in dealing with the third wave. These include:

- IT equipment, to be deployed at 176 vaccination sites around the country in order to computerize the capturing of data. This will ease the process of reporting and record keeping. We have also received logistics and HR support for vaccination programme.
- Several EU member countries such as Germany, Finland, Belgium and Norway have provided laboratory consumables, personal protective equipment, and hospital beds, to name a few.
- The United Kingdom has supported us with capacity building on COVID-19 case management and emergency care via online training.
- Africa CDC/AU has donated medical equipment, pharmaceuticals and lab consumables.
- Significant contribution by the local business community and individuals has also been significant. The donation included oxygen, oxygen tank, oxygen concentrators, hospital beds, medical equipment, the establishment of additional COVID-19 isolation facilities, and psychosocial support for frontline workers, just to mention but a few.
- We commend and thank our First Lady, Madam Monica Geingos, for initiating activities that support the creation of awareness on the importance of combating false information around vaccination as well as the importance of supporting our frontline workers. This support is wholeheartedly welcome and truly appreciated.
- The Africa CDC delegation that visited Namibia in the past two weeks has commended Namibia for the innovative approach to repurpose existing health infrastructure as part of the COVID-19 response. They indicated that they will recommend our model for adoption in other countries to combat the disease.

5. The existing COVID-19 public health measures have been amended, as part of our ongoing efforts to combat the pandemic, to protect our people and to enable Namibians engage in activities that support livelihoods. As we are all aware, our economy has been severely battered by the impact of this pandemic and a balance has to be struck in terms of saving lives and preserving the livelihoods of our people. As stated by His Excellency, the President, I will provide further context on some of the the amendments to the current Public Health COVID-19 General Regulations: Public and Environmental Health Act, 2015 for the period of 1-14 August 2021.

6. Education

Management of Educational institutions must ensure that school environment is safe for employees, learners and students. The following measures should be implemented:

- Encourage vaccination of teachers, other staff members and eligible learners.
- Screen for symptoms using the Ministry of Health and Social Services COVID-19 screening tools and testing of symptomatic learners and school staff;

- Ensure distancing in dining halls;
- No contact sports are allowed;
- Strict supervision of COVID-19 public health measures;
- Rapid response teams to be on alert to respond to reported new cases in schools; and
- Strengthen health education and awareness in schools as a continuous process. Life skills teachers should be empowered to provide psychosocial support to affected learners and staff members.

7. Institution of Higher Education

- 7.2. Online teaching, learning and assessment for programmes not requiring practical exposure and having large class sizes must continue.
- 7.3. Blended mode of teaching, learning and assessment for laboratory based training programmes, including engineering, clinical training, and TVET programmes, as well as programme requiring professional registration must continue.

8. COVID-19 Laboratory test

Only the approved and validated Antigen-Rapid Diagnostic Test (ag-RDT) kits will be authorized for use in Namibia. Use of these kits must be linked to an approved local laboratory, clinic, hospital and casualty settings only. No other Ag-RDT will be allowed to be used in the country without authority from the Namibia Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRC).

I shall now update and elaborate on key issues.

9. Hospital Beds Occupancy

- 9.1. The hospital bed occupancy rate has significantly improved in most of the regions, both for general isolation and for ICU. During the last two weeks, the bed occupancy rate reduced by 18% in general isolation from 55% to 45% BOR, while for ICU, a reduction of 52% was observed from 111% to 53% by 29 July 2021.
- 9.2. A seventy-beds (70) isolation field hospital attached to the Katutura Intermediate Hospital was completed and inaugurated and handed over to Government by the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry yesterday, the 29 July 2021. The field hospital will be managed as ward of the Katutura State Hospital. The former building of the NIP at Katutura Intermediate Hospital was repurposed and converted into a 46-bed ward for Covid-19 patients. This is in addition to the 74-bed Old TB Ward, the conversion of the 4A into a 64-bed ward and the repurposing of 5A into a 34-bed facility all at Katutura Intermediate Hospital. Work has started for the construction of a 98-bed ward at Katutura Hospital.

- 9.3. A twelve (12) bed prefabricated isolation hospital at Okahao was handover to the contractor on 28 July 2021. Plan for construction of isolation facilities at Andara, Otjiwarongo, Okahandja and Karasburg are at an advanced stage.

10. Mortuaries

Mortuary space has been increased at Windhoek Central Hospital, Mariental, Walvis Bay, Okahandja, Otjiwarongo, Outapi, Onandjokwe, Gobabis and Tsumeb. The space of fixed mortuaries was complemented with mobile refrigerated containers of various capacities.

11. Oxygen

In light of increased hospitalizations during the third wave, severe pressure was experienced regarding the access to and availability of sufficient and reliable oxygen to support patients who need it. This was one of the challenges during the peak of the pandemic. This experience has taught us that we need to create local capacity for oxygen production in the country. In the meantime, oxygen bulk tanks have been installed at some health facilities and oxygen cylinders were procured and are being filled with imported oxygen on a regular basis in collaboration with the private sector and other partners. The bulk oxygen tanks are in use at the following health facilities:

- Katutura respiratory unit: 20 tons
- Walvis Bay Hospital: 6 tons
- Tsumeb Hospital: 6 tons
- Oshakati hospital: 20 tons installation in progress.
- Katutura Nurses Home Hall: 13 tons installation to commence.
- Swakopmund State Hospital: 20 tons, bulk tank being refurbished.

Installation of other oxygen supply infrastructure are ongoing at other hospitals. This included the supply of oxygen concentrators to be deployed at health facilities around the country.

12. Vaccination Campaign

- 12.1. The vaccination programme has made great progress, despite the setback of delayed delivery of doses from some suppliers. An additional forty-eight (48) new vaccination sites have been established so that we can increase the vaccination footprint around the country. These includes all 14 Police Regional Headquarters, and several mobile teams and private facilities.
- 12.2. As of 29 July 2021, a total of 159 881 or 10.5% percent of the eligible population has received the first dose, while and 48 069 persons or 3.1% of the eligible population are fully vaccinated.

- 12.3. A public-private vaccination innovation was introduced in the Khomas Region in the form of a drive-through vaccination site at the Windhoek Showgrounds. The private sector, led by Gondwana and Osh-Med in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Services had set-up the first-ever Drive-through vaccination site at the Windhoek showground. This innovative idea attracted over 1000 individual for vaccination within the first 2 days. The Ministry provided complementary staff, forms and vaccines for this operation.
- 12.4. A consignment of 250 000 doses of Sinopharm that government procured from Sinopharm China was delivered on 16 July 2021 and has since been distributed to all 14 Regions by 18 July 2021. We are grateful to the Private sector for its contribution through the Vaccines for Hope coalition.
- 12.5. During the last briefing, I announced 165 200 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, a donation from the Government of the United State of America. I am happy to inform you that the number of doses has been increased to 302 000. These doses will be delivered to Namibia through the COVAX Facility. We will inform the nation of the delivery date in due course.
- 12.6. The State of Netherlands has pledged and confirmed that they will support Namibia with 75 000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine. The Ministry has concluded and submitted all required documents and are expecting information on the delivery date. The consignment will greatly help Namibia vaccinate those awaiting their outstanding 2nd doses of AstraZeneca. We are working day and night to ensure that all individual whose 2nd dose of vaccination is outstanding, will be vaccinated as soon as the doses become available.
- 12.7. We received communication yesterday that 9 714 of the 333 333 doses of Johnson & Johnson vaccine procured through the Africa Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT) will be delivered during the week of 23 August 2021.
- 12.8. All vaccination sites around the country currently have access to the Sinopharm vaccines. We expected to see the vaccines landscape diversified, with increased access to other types of vaccines. This week, the Ministry conducted training on the administration and other aspects of the Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson vaccines. The Training of Trainers attended by over 140 HCWs from around the country was conducted in anticipation of the arrival of these vaccines in the country soon. The attending Trainers of Trainers will cascade the training to vaccinators at District and facility level to increase the staff compliment of staff trained to handle and administer the above two vaccines.
13. On Monday and Tuesday this week, I visited Oshikoto, Oshana and Omusati Regions to observe the COVID-19 Response situation, especially the vaccination activities in those Regions. I visited vaccination sites at Outapi, Tsandi, Okahao, Oshakati and Onandjokwe. I must express my grave concern about the extremely low vaccine uptake, especially in

Omusati Region. Of the various vaccine sites that I visited, I found no, or only a few persons who have come for vaccination. While vaccination teams were deployed at the sites, members of the public have not showed up. According to vaccination officials, the daily average of vaccines at their respective sites per day, is only in two-digit figures. This is a cause for serious concern and I wish to use this platform to call on all eligible persons to go for vaccination. It was reported that some health workers have in fact been discouraging members of the public to get vaccinated. Health workers are strongly warned not to engage in such activities. Those who make themselves guilty of such violations will be dealt with in terms of applicable laws and regulations.

14. In my conclusion, I would like to thank the public for ongoing cooperation that has enabled our country to suppress further infection, reduces hospitalization and death in the last two weeks. We have taken a calculated risk with the consideration of these new measures. While some are being relaxed to achieve balance between saving lives and ensuring livelihoods, we must not let our guards down. We must exercise self-policing to ensure the situation remains under control. Each one of us have a responsibility to protect our families, our communities, and our nation.

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