

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**STATEMENT BY DR KALUMBI SHANGULA, MINISTER OF HEALTH AND
SOCIAL SERVICES ON OCCASION OF THE 41st COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING**

15 March 202

**STATE HOUSE
WINDHOEK**
**Check 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 Dr. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of MIRCO
Honourable Ministers
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen!

1. Over the past four weeks, the COVID-19 epidemic situation in Namibia has continued to show remarkable decline in terms of the number of new COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths. This positive trend provides a window of opportunity for the Ministry of Health and Social Services, in particular, and the government to fast-track the implementation of different national priority interventions, especially those related to strengthening essential public health care services. With measured optimism and out of abundance of caution, we are closely monitoring and observing the isolated clusters of COVID-19 infections around the country, especially in schools and other localities as reported. Many of these clusters were timely contained by COVID-19 response teams in collaboration with school authorities.
2. As at 14 March 2022, Namibia has recorded a total of 157 449 COVID- 19 cases, out of the 968 999 samples tested. This translates into an additional 639 confirmed cases since the last Public Briefing on 13 February 2022. A total number of 155 286 recoveries were reported, translating into a recovery rate of 97.3%. This is a 3% increment from where we were during the last briefing. Active cases have also decreased from 2 827 during the last briefing to 222, currently. This is a significant reduction of 92.1% in active cases, indicating remarkably low transmission rates during the period under review. Unfortunately, 19 lives were lost since the last briefing, bringing the number of deaths to 4 014 since the beginning of the pandemic. All deaths during the review period are of individuals who are not vaccinated.
3. It is important to reiterate at this point that the pandemic is by no means over yet. The number of cases being reported in recent weeks equates to an average of 14 cases per day in the last seven days, translating to a 73.1% decrease in confirmed cases compared to a week of the last Public Briefing, where the daily average was 52 cases per day. From 13 February 2022 to 14 March 2022, a period of 29 days covering the current dispensation a total of 30 133 samples were tested, compared to 37 309 samples tested during the 28 days of the preceding dispensation. Out of these, 639 new cases were confirmed giving a positivity ratio of 2.1% compared to a 6.5% positivity ratio during the preceding period.
4. These figures indicate that the number of tests conducted decreased by 19.2% with a record 73.7% decline in the number of confirmed cases, while the positivity ratio decreased significantly to 2.1%, which is within the WHO recommended positivity ratio of below 5%. Correspondingly, the number of deaths decreased significantly

from 174 deaths reported during the preceding 28 days to 19 deaths reported during the period of 29 days of this dispensation, a decline of 89.1%. The number of COVID-19 patients admitted in hospitals also decreased to an average of 22 per day as compared to 64 reported during the preceding 28 days. The same is true for the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to Intensive Critical Units which has dropped from 5 to 2 ICU cases by 13 March 2022.

5. COVID -19 vaccination is one of the effective strategies for reduction in COVID-19 severity and mortality. Through various social media platforms and organized vaccination campaigns, we continue to provide factual information to the public and educate them about the importance of getting vaccinated. The anti-vaccination groups are doing more damage than good to our society. They must desist from their unpatriotic and dangerous escapades. Their subversive actions have increased vaccine hesitancy among the Namibian population, placing more people at risk of contracting infections, developing COVID-19 related complications, and deaths.
6. Our national vaccination statistics show that at 14 March 2022, a total of 446 587 persons have received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. This translates into 25% of the eligible population of persons aged 12 years and above, numbering 1 779 271 persons. Of these, 437 086 are persons aged 18 years and above and 9 501 are children aged 12-17 years. Collectively, 377 752 (or 21.2%) eligible persons are fully vaccinated. The average daily vaccination uptake fluctuates, but remains disappointingly low on average at 472 for the first dose and 154 for the second dose per day. By 14 March 2022, a total number of eligible persons who have received booster doses in Namibia stood at 30 554, which is a 32% increase from 20 874 reported during the last public briefing.
7. In support of the country's COVID-19 vaccination programme, the following doses were donated to Namibia as from 18 February 2022 to date:
 - 168 000 doses of Johnson & Johnson were donated by United State of America
 - 19 890 doses of Pfizer were donated by United State of America and
 - 60 000 doses of AstraZeneca were donated by United Kingdom.

The country has sufficient doses of different COVID-19 vaccines in stock.

8. Although current statistics reveals a downward trend of infection rates, there is a need for continuous preparedness for any upsurge of infection in terms of availability of beds, medical oxygen supply and mortuaries. Many projects have been completed or are ongoing. The Ministry received a donation of 200 beds from USAID and these beds are being distributed at the newly created isolation units. In the effort to limit the referrals from district hospitals, the Government has embarked upon the establishment of intensive care unit at most district hospitals.

9. On medical oxygen, the Government, together with the Government of Wales, USAID, CDC and Bank of Namibia have expanded capacity to provide medical oxygen. The upgrades have been completed at Katima Mulilo, Grootfontein and Outjo hospitals. Further upgrades are being undertaken at Rundu, Nkurenkuru, Gobabis and Onandjokwe hospitals.
10. We continue to be guided by the COVID-19 epidemiological trajectory to make informed decisions when reviewing the current Public Health General Regulations. I will now proceed to provide technical details on the amendments to the COVID-19 Public Health Regulations as announced by His Excellency, the President.

10.1. Duration of the public health measures

The duration of the new public health measures will run from the **16 March 2022 to the 15 April 2022**. The measures remain amenable to further adjustments should the situation changes for the worse, which we do not anticipate at this stage.

10.2. Wearing of masks

Wearing of masks in public place is no longer mandatory. However, people who are in close settings, including in public transport, indoor public meetings where some of the attendees are not vaccinated and other similar settings are encouraged to wear masks. Physical distance of no less than 1 meter must be maintained at all times.

10.3. Gatherings

As the number of COVID-19 cases and related deaths declined markedly with lower transmission, we are adjusting the number of attendees at public gatherings from 500 to 1000 persons per event. Maintenance of the minimum physical distance should apply and depending on the size of the venue, the number of attendees should be adjusted accordingly to comply with the minimum requirement of physical distancing.

10.4. Education

Measures related to education remain unchanged. We have noted clustering of Covid-19 infection in schools. We encourage vaccination of teachers, other staff members and eligible learners. All schools will continue to operate in face-to-face mode at full capacity, with strict compliance to the established Standard Operating Procedures to prevent the spread of infections. It is encouraged that masks should be worn during classes.

10.5. Sale of alcohol

The measures related to the sale of liquor are retained without change. However, owners of premises are encouraged to ensure that the clients comply with Covid-19 preventive measures. It is our shared responsibility to assist fellow citizens in preserving their lives.

10.6. Business operations

Business owners shall continue to operate in line with the provisions of their business licenses. Business owners of restaurants, bars, kapaņas, hair salons and others must enforce the compliance with Covid-19 protocols by employees such as the wearing of masks and social distancing. It is also the duty of the clients to demand the wearing of masks by waitresses, hairdressers and other service providers as they are in close proximity to the clients.

10.6. Contact Sport

The total number of spectators at the sporting event is increased in line with number of public gatherings to 1000 attendees.

10.7. Public transport

As public transport is operating at full capacity, drivers and passengers should continue to wear masks throughout the journey and sanitise for their own safety.

10.8. Burials

The rituals related to burials of persons who succumbed to COVID-19 and those who died due to other causes will proceed in the same manner, but with due regard to infection control measures. Burials of remains of Covid-19 individuals will be done in the same cemetery for those who died of other causes. Restrictions on the number of persons permitted at memorial services and burial sites is also increased to 1000 attendees. All prevention protocols should be strictly enforced.

10.9. Requirements for entry in the country

Fully vaccinated travellers are no longer required to produce negative PCR test results. They are required to present authentic valid vaccination card at Point of Entry. Travelers who are not fully vaccinated must produce a negative Covid-19 PCR test result that is not older than 72 hours calculated from the date that the sample for testing was taken and was issued by a laboratory that is certified in the country of issue, to issue SARS-CoV-2 PCR test results.

11. Before I conclude my statement, I wish to share in the good news with the public that Namibia has overcome Hepatitis E outbreak. As you may recall, Namibia declared Hepatitis E outbreak on 14 December 2017. By 4 February 2022, a total of **8 092** Hepatitis E cases were reported, of which **2 124** or 26.2% were laboratory confirmed. Sixty-six (**66**) Hepatitis E deaths were recorded with a Case Fatality Rate of **0.8%**. The last death due to Hepatitis E occurred in September 2020.

12. Hepatitis E cases have dropped since the last quarter of 2020. The acute phase of a virus outbreak is defined by the propagation of the virus within communities through transmission of the virus from one person to another. With respect to Hepatitis E, this phase is considered to have been interrupted when no confirmed cases are detected for a period of 20 weeks or two times the maximum incubation period for Hepatitis E infections, following the last potential exposure to the last case had occurred. We had declared the elimination of Hep E in Namibia.

13. Back to Covid-19! The relaxation of public health measures as announced today does not imply that the danger of Covid-19 infection is over. We will soon enter the winter period when people tend to be close together in enclosed settings without ventilation. This presents ideal condition for the transmission of infections. Although masks are no longer mandatory, they are still effective and necessary in preventing the transmission of infection. People are encouraged to keep on wearing their masks. Let us look at it this way! When it is raining, you do not expect the government to tell you to use your umbrella. You do it out of own volition because it is a necessity. The same should apply to wearing of masks. You are in charge of your own protection and that of the other people around you.
14. Namibia has a track record in overcoming epidemics. Poliomyelitis was eliminated through mass vaccination. The victory over Hepatitis E gives us the confidence and optimism that we shall overcome the challenges of Covid-19. I thank the public for understanding and cooperation during this pandemic. Working together is a good recipe for success.

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