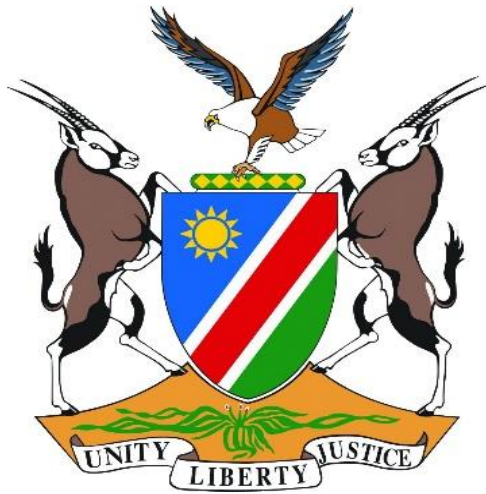


TherePUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**STATEMENT BY HONORABLE DR KALUMBI SHANGULA, MINISTER OF
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 44th COVID-19
PUBLIC BRIEFING**

14 June 2022

**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. Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila

Honourable Ministers

Senior Government Officials

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. As I reflect on the past and current trajectory of COVID-19 pandemic, I am reminded of where Namibia was today, one year ago, responding to the ferocious and devastating Third Wave of the Pandemic. So destructive was it that during that wave, we had observed the highest number of daily new infections, hospitalizations, ICU admissions, and deaths due to COVID-19. On this day, exactly one year ago, Namibia recorded 1 206 new COVID-19 infections and 32 deaths, in a single day. During that third wave, we also recorded the highest number of new infections in a single day, which was 2 547. I am reminded of the overwhelming burden that this wave placed on our health system, as well as the pain and suffering that Namibians endured. As destructive as that wave was it also demonstrated the tenacity and steadfastness of the Namibian people in the face of danger.

2. It was a stark reminder to strengthen our preparedness and response to COVID-19, as well as other public health emergencies. The Government, undertook to strengthen our health system, in collaboration with key development cooperation partners, in order for Namibia to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included:
 - Improving health infrastructure by increasing isolation and ICU bed capacity at health facilities across the country;
 - Improving access to medical oxygen at health facilities through upgrading and installing bulk oxygen tanks and oxygen-generating systems;
 - Increasing the availability of medical equipment and consumables, including personal protective equipment, as well as pharmaceutical items;
 - Training and recruiting more health care workers across different disciplines;
 - Training frontline health and care workers, on a variety of themes from disease surveillance, laboratory diagnostics, case management, and risk communication and community engagement;
 - Improving COVID-19 vaccination coverage, especially among at-risk population groups; and
 - Putting in place COVID-19 Public Health Measures, with due regard to protecting lives and promoting livelihoods.

Epidemiological Situation

3. As at 13 June 2022, Namibia has recorded 168 448 COVID-19 cases out of the 1 050 977 samples tested. Currently, there are 1 921 active cases compared to 1 034 at the time of the last Public Briefing. Sadly, eighteen (19) lives were lost during this special period bringing the total number of deaths to 4 049 since the beginning of the pandemic. The number of deaths increased from 8 deaths reported during the preceding 26 days to 19 deaths reported during the period of 29 days of this dispensation, an increase of 125%. Moreover, the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to hospitals increased to an average of 30 per day as compared to 17 reported during the preceding 26 days. However, the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to ICU has reduced from 9 to 7 cases currently.
4. The recent increase in the number of new cases continue to be driven by the BA.4 and probably BA.5 sub lineages of the Omicron variant. The circulation of these sub-lineages was established through the genome sequencing by the University of Namibia. Future sequencing of COVID-19 and other pathogens will be complemented through additional capacity at the Namibia Institute of Pathology which received two sequencing machines, through support from Africa CDC. The BA.4 and BA.5 sub-lineages of the Omicron variant share similar characteristics in that they both are highly transmissible.
5. We are revising some of our Standard Operating Procedures in accordance with most recent evidence on COVID-19. The duration of isolation for positive COVID-19 cases has been reduced to five days for asymptomatic cases and those exhibiting mild disease. Similarly, we have also reduced the duration of quarantine for contacts to five days. This is consistent with recent scientific evidence and international best practice for controlling the spread of COVID-19, while minimizing disruptions to social and economic activities. We have also made progress in training response personnel in the Regions on the use of digital platforms for managing COVID-19 pandemic data known as Go.Data with support from WHO, CDC, Global Fund and the Robert Koch Institute.

Vaccination Campaign

6. As at 12 June 2022, a total of 492,243 persons have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine countrywide. This represents 28% of the eligible population of persons aged 12 years and above which amounts to 1 779 271 nationally. As at 12 June 2022, a total of 422 690 or 24% of the total eligible persons are fully vaccinated, while 69 562 persons have received booster doses in Namibia. I wish to appreciate the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety & Security, for the partnership that saw inmates and NAMPOL members getting vaccinated around the country.

7. As we have been saying all along, vaccines are effective and safe. They prevent infection, serious illness, hospitalizations, death due to COVID-19 and other diseases. I urge all eligible Namibians to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as it is the right thing to do. The country remains in the campaign mode on vaccination, which is aimed at ensuring eligible persons receive their jabs. The doses do not belong in warehouses and refrigerators, they must be administered in the arms of Namibians in order to afford them protection.
8. It is indeed regrettable that due to the slow uptake and reluctance to get vaccination, a substantial amount of more than 300 000 doses had to be disposed of as they have reached their expiry date. As part of the overall response to public health events, the Ministry and stakeholders are actively responding to the current outbreaks of scabies and measles. On that score, I re-emphasize the critical need to get children vaccinated against measles as it is a disease that can be prevented through immunization. Currently, doses of COVID-19 vaccines in country are sufficient to sustain our national vaccination campaign.

Digital Vaccination Certificate

9. There are still uncertainties in the public about Vaccination Certificates. A month ago, we rolled out the issuance of the digital COVID-19 certificates. Persons who need digital vaccination certificates for travelling purposes, can access this service through an internet link provided on the Ministry's various media platforms. Those who need assistance with troubleshooting can contact the Toll-free COVID-19 Call Centre at 0800 100 100.
10. I shall provide brief status on two other diseases of interest, namely measles and scabies.
 - 10.1. **Measles** is a viral infection that starts in the respiratory system. Symptoms include cough, fever, red eyes, sore throat and white spots in the mouth. Measles is highly contagious. At the beginning of April this year, we had an outbreak of measles in Omusati Region among the learners which started in one school. A total number of 23 cases have been recorded so far. The ages range from 5 months to 9 years. All cases are stable and none of them was admitted in hospital. The Ministry has enhanced surveillance activities in all adjacent districts and regions.
 - 10.2. **Scabies** is an infestation of the skin by the human itch mite. The minute mite burrows into the upper layer of the skin where it lives and lay its eggs. The most common symptoms of scabies are intense itching and a pimple-like skin rash. On 28 March 2022, the Ministry received reports of increasing number of human scabies from Omaheke, Ohangwena, Kavango East and Kavango West. So far, a total of 5 588 scabies cases were reported country-wide. Management activities were put in action and the disease is now under control.

11. The Ministry has triggered surveillance measures in lieu of the Monkeypox outbreak that was reported in some countries Europe, North America and Australia. Monkeypox is a viral zoonosis which can be transmitted through respiratory secretions, skin lesions and contaminated objects. The characteristic signs are scabs and swollen lymph nodes. Prevention is mainly through educating the public on how the disease is transmitted so that individuals take precautionary measures. Namibia has not recorded a case of monkeypox but is ready to identify monkeypox cases and has the capability to confirm monkeypox through laboratory diagnosis. The public should remain calm.
12. As part of disease control, the MOHSS and key development cooperation partners, are conducting a stakeholder meeting on 14 and 15 June 2022 in Windhoek to enhance immunization activities and mobilize resources for this ongoing national effort.
13. Although the update I have just given is re-assuring, my earnest plea is for us not to let down our guard. Let us continue to build on our successes and address the challenges that we still face to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic once and for all.
14. I now wish to expand on the amendments to the Public Health COVID-19 General Regulations: Public and Environmental Health Act, 2015, for the period of 16 June to 15 July 2022 as announced by His Excellency, the President.
15. **Wearing of Masks**
Yes, the mandatory wearing face masks in public places has been lifted. However, to control the spread of infections, the public is urged to continue wearing face masks, especially in indoor and poorly ventilated settings including in the aeroplanes. Owners of establishment shall retain the right of admission to patrons, as it pertains to the wearing of face masks.
16. **Public Gatherings**
The number of people permitted at gatherings remains unchanged at 1000. I re-iterate the importance of maintaining physical distancing and wearing of face masks, in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 infections at gatherings.
17. **COVID-19 Travel Requirements at Point of Entry into Namibia**
 - 17.1. Fully vaccinated travelers, whether Namibian or non-Namibian citizens are allowed to enter the country **without** a PCR test if they present proof of fully vaccinated status. Travelers who are not fully vaccinated must present a PCR negative test result. A person is considered fully vaccinated if he or she meets any of the following criteria:

- Received 2 doses of a 2-dose primary series vaccine or
- Received 1 dose of a single-dose primary series vaccine.

The minimum time between administration of the vaccine dose connoting full vaccination and entry into Namibia is 14 days.

- 17.2. Children under 12 years of age will **no longer** require proof of vaccination status or a negative COVID-19 test result to enter Namibia. Every effort must be made to ensure that family members traveling to Namibia, especially children, are not separated from one another at points of entry as part of enforcing COVID-19 public health regulations.
18. As I conclude, I wish to inform that the change in the epidemiological trajectory, along with our ongoing efforts in strengthening Namibia's health system, has guided our decision to amend the COVID-19 Public Health Regulations as announced. Based on the WHO COVID-19 Resurgence Thresholds, the COVID-19 pandemic in Namibia seems to be under control. Nevertheless, we continue to monitor the COVID-19 Resurgence Thresholds at regional and district levels to ensure that response activities correspond with the phase of COVID-19 resurgence. We are still in the winter months, which calls for heightened vigilance so as not to reverse the gains that have been achieved so far. I call on all Namibians to comply with the COVID-19 public health regulations. I underscore the fact that our data continues to illustrate consistently that the overwhelming majority of COVID-19 cases being hospitalized, those in high care and ICU, and those succumbing to COVID-19 are invariably persons who are **unvaccinated!** So please, fellow Namibians, get vaccinated to protect yourselves and those around you.

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