

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



THE PRESIDENCY

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB

**ON THE OCCASSION OF THE 32nd COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING ON THE
NATIONAL RESPONSE MEASURES**

30 JULY 2021

WINDHOEK

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Good afternoon, fellow Namibians.

This is a most sombre time in our nation's history. The past several weeks have been exceptionally difficult as we continue our battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. The loss of lives has been unprecedented. Indeed, Namibia weeps for her dearly departed children. We have lost grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters. We have lost husbands and wives. We have lost friends and colleagues.

We have lost leaders, teachers, mentors. We have lost our frontline workers. We have lost stalwarts of our liberation struggle. We have lost bedrocks of our communities and nation. We have witnessed pillars of strength whittle away in our presence.

Today, the pain of loss continues across the country and this morning, I received the heartbreaking news that Hon. Veno Kauaria, Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation lost her life in the fight against COVID-19.

I am aware that many of you are carrying the heavy burden of loss and bereavement. You are not alone. The whole nation has been affected by the specter of death and we stand together, shoulder to shoulder as we confront the most deadly challenge this country has faced. I therefore offer my sincere condolences to the families and friends of all our Namibian brothers and sisters who have succumbed to COVID-19 and related illnesses. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

Fellow Namibians,

We have been confronting the deadly third wave of the pandemic in recent weeks. There is some degree of relief because over the last 14-day observance period, we have witnessed a welcome respite. There has been a noticeable reduction in the positivity rate, from the high figure of more than 40 percent at the beginning of July, to an average 28 percent in the last two weeks.

The numbers of new infections have reduced, concomitant with lower number of hospitalizations due to COVID-19. More isolation and ICU beds are becoming available in the public and private sector health facilities. These are signs of progress in suppressing the transmission, across the country.

Cumulative infections in the country now stand at one-hundred-and-seventeen-thousand-eight hundred-and-ninety six (117 896) since the Index Case in March 2020. Encouragingly, the national Recovery Rate stands at 80 percent, while the fatality rate stands at 2.5 percent.

However, the fact that we have recorded 1,414 deaths within 28 days is troubling. It is therefore critical that we do everything within our power to reduce the alarming rate of deaths that we are experiencing. Deaths are destroying our families, our communities and our nation at large.

There has been considerable reduction in new infections across all regions. However, there has been a notable rise in deaths in the Kavango West, Oshana, Omusati and Hardap Regions. Omaheke has the highest case fatality rate of 6.5 percent, almost three times the national average of 2.5 percent. In this regard, we must maintain absolute vigilance as a means to reduce new infections; get more people vaccinated in order to prevent severe COVID-19 illness and death. That is the nature of the challenge we face. We cannot tire. We cannot relent.

Although the Incidence Curve has plateaued and started on a downward slope over the last 14 days, this is no cause for celebration. We are not out of the woods yet. This disease has cost us too much in terms of precious lives of our loved ones lost, our businesses and sources of livelihood severely impacted. The nature of this disease has forced us to adopt new ways of interaction. We must continue to adhere to the interventions that we have put in place.

We cannot throw caution to the wind or abandon the Health and Safety Protocols, which have been designed for our protection. That will be disastrous for our country. Let us not grow weary of doing what is right: Social and physical distancing, the wearing of face masks, safe hand hygiene and vaccination are the best and proven methods to defeat COVID-19.

We must therefore, continue to marshal our resolve and resources, towards total suppression of this virus in order to move towards a semblance of normalcy. We witnessed, a few weeks ago in some parts of Europe, soccer and tennis stadia filled to capacity, with persons not even wearing face masks. That is confirmation that returning to a measure of normalcy is within reach if we succeed with our vaccination campaign.

But in order for us to succeed, we must fully deploy all the measures at our disposal to bring an end to this devastation. I appreciate the engagement of the public via social media as we seek solutions to overcome this pandemic. Many of you have sent me helpful but thought-provoking suggestions. Today alone, I received more than 60 messages from Namibians sharing their ideas with me on how to deal with COVID-19. We will definitely try and accommodate some of your ideas, as far as feasible.

Fellow Namibians,

We should continue adhering to the Public Health Regulations, by minimizing personal movement and travel, and very importantly, getting vaccinated. Our target is to vaccinate at least 1,5million of eligible Namibians or 60 percent of the population by 31 March 2022, to attain herd immunity. While respecting the health choices of the individual, we find ourselves in a unique and rather complex crisis, in which the decisions of the individual have a bearing on the collective.

The national vaccination rate, for persons fully vaccinated, has increased marginally from 1.3 percent two weeks ago, to the 1.8 percent vaccine population coverage.

Those who have received the first dose have increased from 5 percent to 6.1 percent, over the same period. This is attributable to a rising rate of daily vaccinations, which currently stands, on average, at 3,082 doses administered daily.

The access to vaccines has been significantly bolstered by the intensification of the vaccination drive across all parts of the country, including through the innovative Vaccine Drive-Through facility in Windhoek, a Private Sector initiative led by the Gondwana Collection. In addition to all the corporate sponsors that I thanked in previous statements, I would further like to recognize and appreciate the contributions made towards our collective fight against Covid-19 by the following organizations:

Pick & Pay; Namibia Breweries; Sanlam; Letshego; Namib Foam; Scania Namibia; Santam Namibia; Momentum Metro Namibia; Swakop Uranium; De Beers Group; Reptile Mineral Resources & Exploration; Deep Yellow Ltd; PPS Insurance Namibia and CBM Tech.

Yesterday the Prime Minister commissioned the Field Hospital at Katutura Hospital, a 77-bed facility funded by the Private Sector. The old Namibia Pathology Institute Building, adjacent to Katutura State Hospital has been renovated, adding 46 beds to the isolation facilities. This adds an additional 123 beds to provide care for those who will need it most. More isolation facilities are being built in regions where the need still exists.

Vaccination remains an an important weapon in our arsenal. I, therefore, reiterate my call upon all Namibians who are eligible, to get vaccinated and help to save lives.

Let us not allow vaccine scepticism to curtail our efforts of reducing new infections and thus opening up and returning our country to normalcy.

I am aware of what has been called an "infodemic" of misinformation in the form of campaigns to deliberately propagate false information about COVID-19 vaccines. Let us not be swayed by those who aim to capitalise on unfounded fears and dissuade our people from getting vaccinated. We must act wisely, act responsibly, act selflessly and act now.

We owe it to ourselves, our loved ones, our communities and the nation at large, to get vaccinated. I also caution those who have been vaccinated to continue to take all necessary precautions and not to adopt a carefree attitude. You still have a responsibility to protect the broader community. Our health experts advise us to behave in a manner that protects our families and our communities. In this context, wearing masks, practicing physical distance and hand hygiene must continue.

Namibia maintains a high level of testing coverage for COVID-19. We have one of the highest testing levels on the continent, with a testing coverage of 239 people tested, per thousand persons. We are third on the continent, after South Africa and Gabon. Testing is important because it enables us to find new infection clusters and thus to target interventions accordingly.

The measures adopted at the start of July were strict, but necessary.

The trends we are reading from the data indicate that the measures, coupled with public compliance to the Regulations, have broken the momentum of the pandemic and suppressed further transmission.

Fellow Namibians,

The current Public Health Regulations will expire at midnight tomorrow, Saturday 31 July 2021. The following Regulations will come into force, for a period of fourteen (14) days from Sunday 01 August 2021 until midnight, Saturday 14 August 2021.

1. The travel restrictions are hereby lifted, permitting the resumption of travel between regions, without a permit, countrywide. The public is however urged to strengthen public health measures at personal and community levels;
2. Public Gatherings as defined in the Regulations have been adjusted to fifty (50) persons per event. Any public gathering should not last for more than two (2) hours;
3. The Curfew will remain in force from 22h00 to 04h00 daily.

4. Education:

- a. All schools are to resume face-to-face teaching and learning on 04 August 2021, with strengthened Infection Prevention and Control measures in place;
- b. Grades 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 to resume face to face teaching and learning on full-time basis, daily;
- c. Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres and lower primary grades may resume, but are required to operate in cohorts/shifts.
- d. The management of educational institutions must ensure the safety of the school environment for employees, learners and students.

5. Restrictions related to liquor: The sale of liquor remains restricted, on take-away basis between 09h00 to 18h00, Monday to Friday, except for those hospitality establishments that have resident guests.

6. Business operations:

- a. All food establishments (restaurants, kapana traders and food vendors) may resume on-site meals, subject to compliance with Health & Safety Protocols;
- b. Businesses deemed to be high-risk, such as Gyms and Sports Clubs remain closed;
- c. Spas, Salons and beauty parlours remain open, subject to adherence to mandatory face masks and maintaining physical distance of no less than 1.5 meters;
- d. Indoor/Outdoor swimming pools and playgrounds may resume operations, subject to adherence to Health & Safety Protocols; and Motor Vehicle Passenger Restrictions remain in force, loading public transport vehicles at half capacity, including for tour operators and shuttle services.

7. Burials: due to COVID-19 must take place within a period of ten (10) days, all the current burial related regulations remain in force.

8. Test results upon entry into the country: The validity of the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test results will be reduced from seven (7) days to seventy-two (72) hours for all travelers, to safeguard the country. Namibians arriving with a de-isolation

certificate within a period of three (3) months will be allowed entry, and not be subject to quarantine.

Fellow Namibians,

Achieving a victory against COVID-19 is within our reach. However, victory can only come about through a disciplined, concerted and collective effort involving the entire spectrum of the citizenry of the Republic of Namibia. We can be our greatest ally or our greatest enemy. It has been said that "Victory is always possible for the person who refuses to stop fighting." Let us not stop taking the fight to the enemy.

Now is not the time to waver, now is not the time to falter, but now is the time to strengthen our resolve and keep fighting in order to defeat COVID-19 and commence with rebuilding our economy.

I now call upon the Ministers of Health and Social Services; Justice; Education and the Attorney General to elaborate or provide further clarification on the technical aspects.

God Bless the Republic of Namibia.