

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



Ministry of Health and Social Services

**STATEMENT BY DR. KALUMBI SHANGULA, MINISTER OF HEALTH AND
SOCIAL SERVICES ON THE OCCASION OF COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING ON THE
NATIONAL RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS**

16 DECEMBER 2020

WINDHOEK

**Check Against Delivery.*

Your Excellency, Comrade President
Your excellency, Comrade Vice President
Right Honourable Prime Minister
Honourable Ministers
Senior Government Officials
Members of the Media
Fellow Namibians!

1. As His Excellency the President has announced, the new measures are aimed at mitigating the further spread of COVID-19 and its impact on our society and economy. The current dispensation, which came into effect on 01 December 2020, remains in force until the 25 January 2021, covering a period of 56 days. Our teams of professionals continue to monitor the pandemic and its trajectory on a regular basis to gather data in order to inform our response.
2. Allow me to contextualize the COVID-19 situation in the world and how Namibia relates to the rest of the world. According to John Hopkins statistics of the 15 December 2020, the world has recorded 73 418 181 cases of COVID-19 with 1 633 272 deaths, representing a 2.2% case fatality ratio. As of 15 December 2020, Namibia has recorded 16 913 with 164 deaths, representing 0.97% case fatality ratio. Namibia case fatality ratio is 2.2 times lower than the world total.
3. Namibia has started to experience a significant increase of confirmed cases since the first week of December 2020. On 11th December 2020, the country recorded the highest number to date of confirmed cases at a total of 324, within a 24-hour period since the outbreak started in March 2020. High numbers of positive cases have been recorded since then. This is a strong indication that like many countries around the world, Namibia is experiencing a second wave of COVID-19 pandemic.
4. As of 15 December 2020, a cumulative number of one hundred and seventy-eight thousand, six hundred and seventy-seven (178 677) COVID-19 tests have been conducted, translating into seventy (70) tests per 1 000 population. This places Namibia in third place on the African continent in terms of the total tests conducted. Namibia is thus doing remarkably well, in terms of testing coverage. The turn-around time still stands at 24-72 hours for results to become available.
5. From the 1 December 2020 to date, a total of two thousand four hundred and ninety-seven (2 497) new COVID-19 cases were confirmed, compared to eight hundred and fifty (850) cases confirmed during the period of 14 days prior to the last COVID-19 Public Briefing on the National Response and Preparedness. This is an exponential increase by 1,647 cases

or 194 %. This is quite alarming. Additionally, the increase in cases has been observed in nine regions, namely Khomas, Erongo, Otjozondjupa, //Karas, Kunene, Oshana, Oshikoto, Kavango East, and Omusati.

6. We continue to report an increase in the number of COVID-19 confirmed cases amongst Health Care Workers (HCWs). The cumulative number of infections among healthcare workers stands at 702. Since the last briefing, we have recorded 139 infections among healthcare workers, compared to 29 infections recorded in the preceding 14 days. This places a huge burden on the health system as it affects the country's capacity to respond to the pandemic. Health care staff and other frontline workers remain the country's key asset in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. We have commissioned an investigation in the circumstances that leads to increase infection among the health care workers.
7. We continue to observe non-adherence to the public health regulations. This conduct, we believe has led to the current increase in COVID-19 cases across the country. We wish to remind the public that correct wearing of face masks, observing physical distancing, avoiding mass gatherings, and regular washing/sanitizing of hands are mandatory. Failure to comply or breach of protocol will attract corresponding sanctions in terms of the Public and Environmental Health Act of 2015. Countries that have been successful in combating COVID-19 have adopted these measures and insisted on compliance. We should also work together as a country to observe these measures in order to protect ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our communities and our countries.
8. I shall now reflect briefly on the Covid-19 vaccine as it has become topical. It was reported that the United States of America and the United Kingdom have rolled out vaccination to the target populations in the respective countries. Vaccination is one of the effective methods to prevent infections. The Ministry of Health and Social Services is running a programme called Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI). When the Covid-19 vaccine becomes available in Namibia, it will be run as part of the EPI.
9. As part of the COVID-19 response, the Ministry of Health and Social Service has been following with keen interest, the development of COVID-19 vaccine. We attended several international and regional strategic and scientific webinars and meetings to learn more about the candidate vaccines and their progression to Phase III of clinical trials evaluations. These include meetings organized by the World Health Organization (WHO); The African Union, Africa CDC, SADC and by the COVAX Facility – under the coalition of WHO, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI). In August 2020, Namibia established a multidisciplinary COVID-19 Vaccine National Task Force to ensure a well-coordinated approach to technical and logistic arrangements for the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine in Namibia.

10. Namibia has developed a costed vaccine introduction plan and a costed community engagement and communication strategy which was approved by Cabinet. Namibia has joined the COVAX Facility to procure vaccine doses for 20% (508 200) of the population and has signed a Committed Purchase Agreement with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization that makes Namibia one of the first recipients of the vaccines. Namibia has also paid to COVAX 15% (N\$28 952 154) of the total cost of N\$193 014 360 upfront for over 1 million (508 200 x 2=1 016 400) doses of vaccine. We are open to enter into bilateral arrangements with countries and companies for access to Covid-19 vaccines. The initial target population, which include health care workers and vulnerable people, has been identified.
11. Covid-19 will not wait for the vaccine to arrive. We must make use of the preventive tools currently at our disposal. The additional measures that were announced by HE The President were carefully selected so as not to cause major disruption to our way of life, to our livelihoods and to the economy. The successful control of Covid-19 transmission depends largely on human conduct. We do not wish to reach a situation when more stringent measures become unavoidable in order to save lives. Let us cooperate and bring Covid-19 under control.