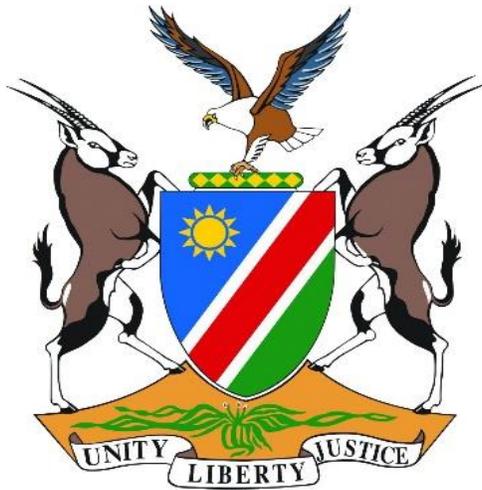


REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**STATEMENT BY DR KALUMBI SHANGULA, (MP) MINISTER OF HEALTH AND
SOCIAL SERVICES, ON OCCASION OF THE 43rd COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING**

13 May 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

Right Honourable Dr. Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, Prime Minister

Honourable Ministers

Senior Officials

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen!

1. I thank you Your Excellency for this opportunity. I shall brief the public on the pandemic situation in the country and report on our ongoing preparedness and response activities. I shall conclude with the amplification of the current public health and social measures that will assist us to navigate through this pandemic.
2. Namibia's COVID-19 response has been premised on scientific and epidemiological data. As the COVID-19 virus was new to the world of science when it started in 2020, our preparedness and response was guided by the science we had available to us by then. As time went on, the science continued to evolve and more and more information became known about this novel virus, especially with regards to its transmission dynamics. And as the science and epidemiology evolved, so did our response, which was evidenced by periods where we had to tighten our public health measures, and periods where we could relax them.
3. Over the last three months, we were able to loosen the public health restrictions as we had observed a very welcomed period of low positivity ratios, low numbers of new daily infections, hospitalizations, ICU admissions and deaths due to COVID-19. We relaxed these measures in the interest of livelihoods and economic recovery, with the understanding that the Namibian public will exercise the advice of government to continue wearing face masks, avoiding social gatherings and practicing frequent hand hygiene, to take up vaccination and to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
4. We have now entered the winter months, which is usually the time of the year when people tend to congregate in close proximity to one another, which creates a conducive opportunity for the COVID-19 virus to easily spread from person to person. Additionally, the colder temperatures in winter negatively affect people's immune systems and thus predispose them to COVID-19 and other respiratory infections. It is against this background that I urge all Namibians not to let down your guard, especially given the fact that we have started to observe upward trends in the epidemiological trajectory.

Epidemiological Situation

5. As at 11 May 2022, Namibia has recorded a total of 159 693 COVID-19 cases out of the 1 016 295 samples tested. Active cases have increased from 296 during the previous briefing to 1 034 currently. Unfortunately, eight (8) lives were lost since the last public briefing, bringing the number of deaths to 4 029 since the beginning of the pandemic. The number of deaths increased from 7 deaths reported during the preceding 25 days to 8 deaths reported during the period of 26 days of this dispensation, an increase of 14.3%. Moreover, the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to hospitals increased to an average of 17 per day as compared to 12 reported during the preceding 26 days. Similarly, the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to ICU has increased from 0 to 9 cases currently.
6. The current upsurge in the number of new cases is driven initially by the Omicron variant sub-lineage BA.2 and of late by sub-lineage BA.4 which have been conclusively identified in Namibia. It is also suspected that the Omicron sub-lineage BA.5 is also circulating in Namibia. The characteristics of these sub-lineages are almost similar. The descendants of omicron variant BA.2 could be more contagious but not cause severe disease. The BA.2 possesses immune evasive properties, which may be the reason why Namibia observed a sharp increase in the number of infections during this week.

Vaccination Campaign

7. As at 11 May 2022, a total of 481 071 persons have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine nationally. This translates into 27% of the eligible population of persons aged 12 years and above (1 779 271) who have received 1 dose. A number of 411 339 (23%) eligible persons are fully vaccinated countrywide. The country remains in the campaign mode on vaccination, which is aimed at ensuring eligible children have access to COVID-19 vaccines. Additionally, the country plans on having integrated immunization campaigns to ensure that routine immunization continue to be conducted. This is critical to prevent possible outbreak of vaccine-preventable diseases.
8. As part of our quality control processes under the Expanded Programmes on Vaccination, the Committee on Adverse Events Following Immunizations (AEFI), monitors, manages and reports all adverse events related to the administration of vaccines. Thus, with respect to COVID-19, the Adverse Events Following Immunizations reporting and monitoring is ongoing. A total of 74 staff member across all 14 regions have been trained as Master trainers to cascade training to operational level. The Adverse Events Following Immunizations Guidelines are reviewed and updated regularly. Additionally, monthly assessment meetings are conducted.

9. Scientific evidence points to the added benefit of booster or additional doses. The Ministry is urging eligible individuals to get their boosters. As at 11 May 2022, the total number of eligible persons who have received booster doses in Namibia stood at 51 287. I hereby reiterate my call to the community to obtain and heed information from reputable sources in order to make informed decisions for their health and that of their families. Vaccines are effective and they prevent serious illness, hospitalizations and death due to COVID-19 and other diseases. Unvaccinated individuals are more likely to meet these unfortunate fates. There is overwhelming data nationally and internationally to illustrate this fact.
10. Namibia has sufficient doses of COVID-19 vaccines in country to sustain our national vaccination campaign. We have also made strides to ensure that the stock levels of essential medical items and consumables are adequate and are distributed throughout the country.

Digital Vaccination Certificate

11. We announced recently that persons who need digital vaccination certificates for travelling purposes can now access this service via an internet link provided on the Ministry's various media platforms. Travelers are now able to receive their digital vaccination certificates on line. Those who need assistance with troubleshooting can contact the toll free COVID-19 Call Centre at 0800 100 100.

Update on Strengthening Health Infrastructure

12. As I reported in the last briefing, we used the period of low case numbers to strengthen our preparedness and response to COVID-19. It is against this backdrop that I wish to give an update on activities for strengthening Namibia's health infrastructure. On 22 March 2022, construction of a 98-bed Isolation Center at Katutura Intermediate Hospital in Windhoek reached completion. This facility is furnished with an intensive care unit as well as hemodialysis services, which fulfils a long-standing demand for Katutura Intermediate Hospital.
13. Moreover, we have been fortunate to receive incredible support from the Welsh Government for medical oxygen through the Cardiff University and UNAM. Two 4-ton oxygen tanks were donated to Gobabis District Hospital and Grootfontein District Hospital, respectively. Additionally, two oxygen-generating systems were donated and installed at Katima Mulilo District Hospital and Nkurenkuru Health Centre, respectively. This is a huge contribution to Namibia's arsenal in combatting COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses for which oxygen therapy is required. I thank the Welsh Government for this support.

14. I now expand on the amendments to the Public Health COVID-19 General Regulations: Public and Environmental Health Act, 2015 for the period of 16 May to 15 June 2022.

15. **Gatherings**

The number of people permitted at gatherings remains unchanged at 1000. However, I stress the importance of maintaining physical distance and wearing of face masks.

16. **Wearing of Masks**

Measures related to wearing of face masks remain unchanged. Although it is no longer a requirement by law to wear a face mask, the wearing of masks is one of our critical interventions in preventing the transmission of infection. It is strongly recommended that people continue to wear face at public places and at all public gatherings including businesses, workplaces, on airplanes, schools, public and private institutions etc. The combination of wearing of face masks, maintenance of physical distance, practising personal hygiene and vaccination greatly reduce the risk of infection.

17. **COVID-19 Test Results at Point of Entry into Namibia**

In the spirit of opening up the economy and balancing lives and livelihoods, fully vaccinated Namibians and Non-Namibian Citizens will be allowed to enter the country without PCR test provided they present proof of fully vaccinated status or present a negative PCR test result valid within the period of 72 hours after the specimen was collected if proof of full vaccination status cannot be provided.

18. As I conclude, I caution that, we do not want to see a reversal of the gains that have been achieved so far. Instead, we want to build on those gains in order to defeat COVID-19 once and for all. Therefore, I call on all of you to comply with the COVID-19 public health regulations and get vaccinated to protect yourself and those around you.

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