

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**STATEMENT BY DR. KALUMBI SHANGULA ON THE OCCASION OF THE 22nd
COVID-19 BRIEFING: ANNOUNCEMENT OF AMENDMENTS TO PUBLIC
HEALTH COVID 19 GENERAL REGULATIONS: PUBLIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH ACT, 2015: MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES.**

3 February 2021

WINDHOEK

**Check against Deliver*

Your Excellency, Dr. Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia,
Your Excellency, Dr. Nangolo Mbumba, Vice President,
Right Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila,
Honourable Ministers,
Senior Government Officials,
Members of the Media,
Dear Compatriots!

1. As it has become customary, we continue to review and adjust our preparedness and response measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. It was on 13 March 2020 when Namibia recorded and reported her index positive COVID-19 case. In the ensuing months, Government has put in interventions aimed at suppressing the spread of the virus and protect the lives of Namibian people. Despite many challenges, these interventions have served our country well. I take this opportunity to commend our frontline workers, who have literally put their lives on the line in order to save others. I also wish to extend our appreciation to our development co-operation partners who have stood with us, planned with us, and supported our efforts during this difficult time.
2. As alluded to by His Excellency, the Public Health Measures announced on the occasion of the 23rd COVID-19 Briefing here at State House, will expire at midnight tonight. We are therefore announcing amendments and adjustments to the Regulations, as part of efforts to ensure that our response remains attuned to, and responsive to effectively combat the pandemic.
3. The last few weeks have seen an upward trajectory in the number of cases. In fact, the peak of the first wave in August which reached 316 cases has been eclipsed by the second wave which reached 683 on 25 December 2020. Similarly, the number of deaths has also increased, surpassing the figures in our disease projections models which indicate that Namibia would have recorded 338 deaths due to COVID-19 by March 2021. By 2nd February 2021, Namibia has recorded 355 deaths. Although the number of deaths is high, other figures, such those related to the projected number of infections, hospitalizations, case severity, have not been overshot. Comparatively, Namibia has done relatively well in terms of the numbers of COVID-19 tests conducted, as we have significantly increased local testing capacity and reduced the backlog such that the results now can be available between 24 and 48 hours.
4. We have also completed the validation of antigen Rapid Test Kits. This will allow for speedier and timely isolation of positive cases as well as expedited testing for departing tourists for jurisdictions that accept negative Rapid Test results for returning passengers.
5. As I indicated, our response and preparedness measures are adjusted on a regular basis, taking into account epidemiological, economic and social variables. The following amendments have been made to the COVID-19 Public Health Regulations in line with the Public and Environmental Health Act of 2015. Where no amendments have been effected, the Regulations as gazetted will continue to apply. These measures are extended to the 24th February 2021 at 24:00. I will highlight only some of the regulations hereunder:

5.1. Regulation 3: Wearing of Masks

The Regulation is extended unchanged. The Ministry of Education Arts and Culture has issued comprehensive guidelines relating to the wearing of masks by children under the age of 5 years.

5.2. Regulation 4: Public Gatherings

This regulation is extended unchanged.

5.3. Regulation 4 A: Restriction of Movement (Curfew)

This regulation is extended unchanged. However, the curfew has been amended to starts at 22:00 and ends at 05:00.

5.4. Regulation 5: Restrictions Relating to Liquor

This regulation is extended unchanged.

5.5. Regulation 6: Resumption of business operations and activities

Businesses are allowed to operate within their normal working hours, with adherence to COVID-19 protocols, and subject to Regulations 4 and 5.

5.6. Regulation 7: Additional provisions relating to work place

This regulation is extended unchanged.

5.7. Regulation 7A: Restrictions related to certain activities

This regulation is extended unchanged.

5.8. Regulation 8: Restrictions related to Entry into Namibia

This regulation is extended unchanged. However, travelers vaccinated against COVID-19 are required to provide a negative COVID-19 test prior to entry in the country. Returning Namibians without a negative COVID-19 test results, will be subjected to quarantine and testing at own cost.

5.9. Regulation 9: Quarantine and COVID-19 Testing

This regulation is extended unchanged.

5.10. Regulation 10: Public Transport

This regulation is extended unchanged.

5.11. Regulation 16: COVID-19 Deaths and Burials

I will speak at some length on this matter given the public response and interest in it.

6. Burial of a person who died of Covid-19 complications

Protocols on **safe burials** of persons who died of Covid-19 have always been informed by the latest medical evidence available at a particular time related to corona virus infectivity, transmissibility and risk of exposure. The aim was and still remains to protect those who are attending the burial from contracting the virus. I always say that we do not

wish that one burial results in more burials. As new medical evidence becomes available, we have always adjusted our burial protocols accordingly. Over the past month, we have been reviewing new evidence related to burials of persons who died of Covid-19 complications and have adjusted our protocols on safe burials as follow:

- 6.1. A person who died from Covid-19 may be buried at the site which the family chooses and not necessarily at the locality where the person has died as has been the case. The new protocol in this regard states as follow:

“Families who choose to bury their loved one outside a locality where the death occurred may do so at their own cost: provided that the human remains are handled by a professional and registered undertaker who has been trained and certified by the State to handle human remains of persons who succumb to notifiable infectious diseases, including COVID-19”.

Such burial, will however be supervised by the officials from the Ministry of Health and Social Services to ensure that all health protocols are observed.

- 6.2. The burial is handled either by the State as a safe burial or by an approved private undertaker, taking into consideration the family’s cultural and religious beliefs. Cultural or religious rites that the family may wish to perform, are permitted but must be conducted in adherence to infection prevention and control safety measures. A register of persons attending the burial should be kept. The ceremony at the burial site should not exceed two (2) hours. Attendance at a burial must not exceed the maximum number of persons allowed in the Regulations. This number excludes the staff members of the MOHSS and the undertaker.
- 6.3. Close family members are allowed at a distance of three meters from the grave. Other mourners must be stationed at a distance of not less than 10 meters from the grave. Mourners must maintain a minimum of not less than two meters physical distancing from one other.
- 6.4. A person who died of Covid-19 complication should be buried in the normal cemetery. The grave should not be less than two (2) metres deep. The grave is covered with soft sand by staff of the MOHSS or the undertaker until the coffin is covered. After that the tools will be disinfected and the family members can fully cover the grave as long as they are wearing the full PPE. Government will not supply such PPE.
- 6.5. Filing past the grave by relatives and mourners and throwing sand or flowers in the grave is allowed provided that mourners do not stand at the grave but keep walking and provided that they maintain a distance of not less than 1.5 meters between them.
- 6.6. The remains of a person who died outside Namibia due to Covid-19 complications shall not be repatriated to Namibia. The remains of a person who died outside Namibia due to Covid-19 complications shall be allowed in Namibia if the body has been cremated. Embalming of the body does not qualify the body to be allowed in the country.
- 6.7. Psychosocial support is to be provided to the bereaved family by the assigned social worker(s) as required. The aim is to improve the coping mechanisms of family members

through bereavement counseling and to facilitate linkage with other service providers and support systems.

7. COVID-19 Vaccination in Namibia

Namibia has made progress in preparation to acquire suitable COVID-19 vaccines. The following milestones have been achieved.

- Namibia has made financial commitment to purchase doses sufficient to vaccinate 20% of the target population through the COVAX Facility.
 - We have put in place mechanisms to ensure country readiness to roll out the COVID-19 vaccines.
 - A National COVID-19 Deployment and Vaccination Plan has been developed.
 - The COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce was established. The Task Force continues to review the latest evidence, training needs of our health workers and all regulatory/legal, and safety frameworks to ensure a high-quality vaccination campaign.
 - The Namibia Medical Regulatory Council is providing the necessary guidance and regulatory oversight.
 - Vaccines go through stringent evaluation to ensure they are safe. In Namibia Polio, Measles, Tuberculosis Prevention Vaccines have worked very well to protect our people and to date we have those diseases under control. The COVID-19 vaccination campaign will be rolled out under our Expanded Programme on Vaccination (EPI).
8. Namibia will collaborate with Botswana in areas related to procurement of vaccine, regulatory approval of vaccines, delivery of vaccines, bilateral agreement for vaccination of citizens, sharing of evidence and best practice in vaccine deployment, technical exchange visits and training, sharing surveillance reports, safety and reports of any Adverse Event following immunization (AEFI) and other opportunities for collaboration as they emerge.
9. Namibia will procure vaccines to immunize at least 60% of its population against Covid-19. During the last briefing on the 13 January 2021, I informed the public that Namibia will receive the first consignment of vaccines from the Covax Facility by the end of January or beginning of February 2021. This was based on a formal letter from Covax Facility, dated the 6 January 2021. Yesterday, I received another letter from Covax Facility stating as follow:
- “We are pleased to inform you that Namibia can expect to be distributed doses of AstraZeneca vaccine....mid/late February, subject to WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL)”.
- Apart from the Covax Facility, we are in discussion with manufacturers of Covid vaccines in China, Russian Federation, India and United States of America for additional vaccines supply to cover the remaining 40% of the population.
10. We are disturbed by misinformation and false claims against the safety and benefits of the vaccines to individuals. Countries are scrambling to obtain vaccines for their citizens and

individuals in Europe and USA are competing to be vaccinated and protected against Covid-19. I call on the Namibian people not to be misled and to have faith in the government.

11. The second wave of Covid-19 has further highlighted the imperative of ensuring that our people comply with the health measures. If we slip up and if we lower our guard, the consequences will be dire and even deadly. For this reason, we must all do our part to protect ourselves and our families. The power to defeat this pandemic is in our own hands.
12. I take this opportunity to thank you all for the cooperation you have shown in our fight against Covid-19. When we all pull together in the same direction, there will be no longer a need to maintain restrictive measures. Let us all work towards that goal.

I thank you.