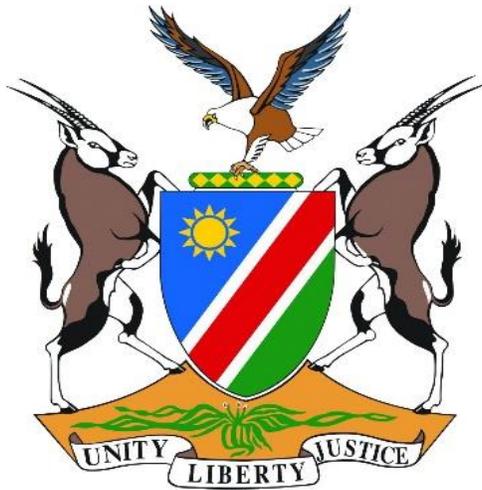


REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

STATEMENT BY DR KALUMBI SHANGULA, MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES ON OCCASION OF THE 40th COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING

14 February 202

**STATE HOUSE
WINDHOEK**

**Check against delivery*

Your Excellency, Dr. Nangolo Mbumba, Vice President of the Republic of Namibia

Rt. Hon Prime Minister, Dr. Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila

Hon Ministers

Senior Officials

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I thank you Comrade Vice President for giving me the floor. This is our second COVID-19 Public Briefing for the year 2022. It has been a challenging two years, going on to the third. During these trying times, the Namibian people have proven their mettle and their resilience in facing this deadly enemy head on. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve. This demands that our response must also be positioned in such a way that we secure public health and keep Namibians safe. This approach has been the cornerstone of our response. It shall continue to guide us going forward.
2. As at 13 February 2022, Namibia has recorded a total of 156 810 COVID- 19 cases, out of the 938 866 samples tested. This translates into an additional 3 520 confirmed cases since the last Public Briefing on 13 January 2022. A total number of 2 054 reinfections were recorded since 8 December 2021. A total number of 152 027 recoveries were reported, translating into a recovery rate of 97%. This is a 5% increment from where we were during the last briefing. Active cases have also decreased from 10 418 during the last briefing to 2 827 currently. Unfortunately, an additional 234 lives were lost since the last briefing, bringing the number of deaths to 3 995 since the beginning of the pandemic. Although fewer cases were reported during the period of current dispensation, we recorded more deaths, and most of these were confirmed during the current dispensation. More than ninety percent of these deaths are of unvaccinated individuals.
3. We can now say that we have emerged from the fourth wave. However, the pandemic itself is not over. The number of cases being reported in recent weeks is more manageable, with an average of 52 cases per day in the last seven days. During the week of the last Public Briefing, the daily average was 450 new cases per day. From 16 January 2022 to 13 February 2022, a period of 29 days covering the current dispensations a total of 37 309 samples were tested, compared to 70 339 samples tested during the 29 days of the preceding dispensation. Out of these, 2 432 new cases were confirmed giving a positivity ratio of 6.5% compared to a 24.8% positivity ratio during the preceding period.
4. These figures indicate that the number of tests conducted decreased by 89.0% with a record decline in the number of new cases of 618%, while the positivity ratio decreased

by 276.9%. Correspondingly, the number of deaths decreased exponentially from 240 deaths reported during the preceding 29 days to 174 deaths reported during the period of 29 days of this dispensation, a decline of 37.9%. The number of inpatients congruently decreased to an average of 64 per day as compared to 643 reported during the preceding 29 days. Same goes for the number of patients in Intensive Critical Units (ICU) which has dropped from 63 to 5 ICU cases by 13 February 2022.

5. We continue with efforts to increase the vaccination coverage. There is a global trend, in countries where the vaccination coverage is high, to do away with testing as a travel requirement but to use the vaccination status. This makes travel cheaper as testing is done at a cost, while vaccination is given for free. This highlights additional benefit of being vaccinated.
6. As at 13 February 2022, a total of 432 976 persons have received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine nationally. This translates into 20.7% of the eligible population. Of these 425 578 are person aged 18 years and above representing 28.9% and 7 398 are children aged 12-17 years, representing 2.4% of that eligible population. Collectively, 367 485 eligible persons are fully vaccinated, inclusive of 1 364 children aged 12-17 years. The average daily vaccination uptake keeps fluctuating but remains disappointingly low at 848 for new doses and 211 for second dose per day.
7. New scientific evidence points to the added benefit of booster vaccines. As at 13 February 2022, a total number of eligible persons who have received booster doses in Namibia stood at 20 874, which is a 60% increase from 8 290 where we were during last briefing. We continue to implore more people to enhance their protection by going for the booster vaccines.
8. Although the national vaccination coverage continues to increase, Namibia has not reached the WHO target of vaccinating 40% of the eligible population by end of 2021, nor are we on track to reach the WHO target of 70% of the eligible population by mid-2022. Although there had initially been extenuating circumstances that worked against our national vaccination efforts, the biggest challenge preventing Namibia from gaining the necessary traction to meet the WHO targets, is vaccine hesitancy amongst our population. I wish to repeat it again that vaccination remains our best hope of ending this pandemic, restoring the dented livelihoods, and re-building our economy. His Excellency the President has declared 2022, the year of Re-imagining. We need to respond to this clarion call to re-imagining Namibia. But we cannot do that if we remain stuck in this COVID-19 pandemic, while there is a proven solution. Please, make the right choice and get vaccinated in order for us to end this pandemic once and for all.

9. The government continues to work hard to ensure that the national COVID-19 preparedness and response is sharpened to meet and overcome challenges that we encounter. This includes the provision and expansion of the necessary physical infrastructure, supply of oxygen, and equipment. During the last public briefing I shared with the public some of the projects being implemented by Government as part of the continuing preparedness and response for COVID-19. They include hospital beds, Intensive Care Units, mortuaries, and oxygen infrastructure. Some of them have been completed and others are ongoing.
10. We continue to be guided by the COVID-19 epidemiological trajectory to make informed decisions when reviewing the current Public Health General Regulations. We remain committed to strike a fine balance between public health and the imperatives of safeguarding peoples' livelihoods, concomitant with the revival of the economy as we adjust the public health measures.
11. I will now proceed to provide technical details on the amendments to the COVID-19 Public Health Regulations as announced by His Excellency, the Vice President.

11.1. Duration of the public health measures

The duration of the new public health measures will run from the **16 February 2022 to the 15 March 2022**. The measures remain amenable to further adjustments should the situation changes for the worse, which we do not anticipate at this stage.

11.2. Gatherings

As we officially pronounce the end of the fourth wave, we find it prudent to adjust the number of attendees at public gatherings from 200 to 500 persons per event. Maintenance of the minimum physical distance should apply and depending on the size of the venue, the number of attendees should be adjusted accordingly to comply with the minimum requirement of physical distancing.

11.3. Education

Measures related to education remain unchanged. We continue to encourage vaccination of teachers, other staff members and eligible learners. All schools will operate in face-to-face mode at full capacity, with strict compliance to the established Standard Operating Procedures to prevent the spread of infections.

11.4. Restrictions related to liquor

The measures related to the sale of liquor are retained without change.

11.5. Business operations

Business owners shall continue to operate in line with the provisions of their business licenses. Business owners of restaurants, bars, kapaņas, hair salons and others must enforce the compliance with Covid-19 protocols by employees such as the strict wearing of masks. It is also the duty of the clients to demand the wearing of masks by waitresses, hairdressers and other service providers. The wearing of masks by all in public space remains a mandatory requirement in Namibia.

11.6. Contact Sport

The total number of spectators at the sporting event is increased in line with number of public gatherings to 500 attendees.

11.7. Public transport

Measures related to public transport remain unchanged.

11.8. Burials

11.8.1. In line with the evolving scientific evidence, the rituals related to burials of persons who succumbed to COVID-19 and those who died due to other causes will proceed in the same manner, but with due regard to infection control measures when a COVID-19 positive body is handled by health care workers and undertaker personnel. Physical contact with the remains of a person who had COVID-19 by a person not trained in infection prevention and control such as a member of the public or family members is strictly forbidden. Burials of remains of Covid-19 individuals will be done in the same cemetery for those who died of other causes.

11.8.2. Restrictions on the number of persons permitted at memorial services and burial sites is also increased to 500 attendees. All prevention protocols should be strictly enforced.

11.9. Rapid Antigen Tests

There are several COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test products on the market. It is important to ensure that the products approved for use are validated by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. The measures related to the use of COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Tests is retained without change.

11.10. Requirements for entry in the country

- 11.10.1. Fully vaccinated Namibians, permanent residence permit holders, diplomats or people with diplomatic passports, officers on missions and their families, domiciles and their children, truck drivers, ambulance services and persons providing specialised and technical public health services will no longer be required to present a negative COVID-19 PCR test result upon entry into Namibia. The above-mentioned categories of people can enter the country at any time with a valid and authentic vaccination card.
 - 11.10.2. Children aged 5-11 years of the above-mentioned categories, who are currently not eligible for vaccination should produce valid negative PCR test results. If positive they should still be allowed entry, but should proceed to isolate at their own cost or self-isolate upon arrival at destination.
 - 11.10.3. Fully vaccinated non Namibians living within a 60 km radius of Namibian borders will be allowed into Namibia without having to present negative COVID-19 PCR results. Such persons should present a Police Declaration from their home country confirming place of residence.
 - 11.10.4. For all other categories of travelers, including truck drivers who are not fully vaccinated, the validity of a negative PCR COVID-19 test results remains 72 hours from time of the collection of the specimen to the time the individual presents him/herself at the point of entry into Namibia.
 - 11.10.5. All incoming travelers must upload their laboratory results on the Trusted Travel system prior to travelling to Namibia. Travelers who are unable to upload due to valid reasons, for example being unable to access the system, should be assisted to authenticate their results at the Port of Entry arrival.
 - 11.10.6. Namibia citizens and permanent residence permit holders who present positive Real-Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test results at points of entry shall be allowed to proceed to the final destination and be subjected to isolation at own cost or to supervised home isolation provided that they have obtained approval for such supervised home isolation from the responsible officials of the Ministry of Health and Social Services.
12. We continue to monitor clinically significant mutations of severe acute respiratory syndrome of coronavirus 2 through Whole Genome Sequencing and Real-Time

Polymerase Chain Reaction. The Omicron variant remains the dominant variant circulating in Namibia. The latest monitoring results revealed that among the samples tested, omicron variant makes up 97% while the delta variant makes up the remaining 3%. The Omicron sub-lineage BA.2 which was detected in South Africa recently has not be detected in Namibia.

13. As stated earlier, we are experiencing fewer new cases of Covid-19 infection. The time of low cases present opportunities to reinforce our toolkit and identify further areas for improvement and strengthening. I call upon the general public to continue adhering to the public health measures for the sake of ourselves, our families, our communities and our country at large. Let us continue to observe public health measures. Let us build on the success we have achieved. Let us not be persuaded by conspiracy theory propaganda. Countries with high vaccination coverage are relaxing requirements like wearing of masks in public place. Let us work towards that goal.
14. In conclusion, I thank the healthcare workers and other frontline workers for tremendous efforts in managing this pandemic. I also thank the public for the cooperation and support we have received. In coming up with these measures, we have also taken into account the input from the members of the public. This pandemic, which is driven greatly by human behaviour needs the collective efforts by all of us.

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