

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

STATEMENT BY DR. KALUMBI SHANGULA, MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES ON THE OCCASION OF THE COVID-19 BRIEFING AND AMENDMENTS TO COVID-19 MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE SECOND WAVE.

23 DECEMBER 2020

WINDHOEK

**Check Against Delivery*

Your Excellency, Dr. Nangolo Mbumba, Vice President
Right Hon Dr Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, Prime Minister
Hon Ministers
Senior Government Officials
Members of the Media
Fellow Namibians!

1. Exactly one week ago, we gathered at this venue, were H. E. The President addressed the nation on the occasion of the 21st COVID-19 Briefing. Additional measures, with stricter restriction were introduced to deal with the unfolding second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in our country. Among others, the number of public gatherings were adjusted downwards, emphasis was placed on the imperative for all persons to wear face masks correctly when in public places, and a passionate plea was sent out to all people to take personal responsibility to suppress the further spread of Covid-19 in our country.
2. I used that occasion to provide context of the pandemic as it evolves globally, and Namibia's position in relation to other countries. The measures introduced on the 16 December 2020, were to remain in force for a period of fourteen days until the 30 December 2020. It has been stated on more than one occasion that Namibia's COVID-19 response has to be dynamic, flexible and nimble in order to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic as it evolves. This is based on a number of variables such as the Basic Reproductive Ratio, the number of new COVID-19 cases recorded in the country, availability of hospital beds to accommodate COVID-19 patients, testing capacity, medical equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), as well as human resources among others.
3. Over the past seven days, we have observed a rapidly changing and deteriorating situation, where the number of positive COVID-19 cases have reached levels never seen before in our country. The number of hospital admissions has sky-rocketed, both in public and private sector facilities, almost outstripping available hospital beds. Similarly, the demand for COVID-19 testing has increased exponentially over the past few days, placing pressure on testing facilities in both public and private sectors.
4. Between 9–15 December 2020, we have recorded a total of 1 615 new Covid-19 cases compared to 2 716 new cases recorded between 16-22 December 2020. This is a matter of grave concern as the cases have increased by 68% after the 16 December 2020. Between 9-15 December 2020, there were 127 hospitalization due to Covid-19. However, between the 16-22 December 2020, there were 217 patients hospitalised due to Covid-19. This translates in 71% increase in hospitalisation. With respect to deaths due to Covid-19, between 9-15 December 2020, there were 11 deaths. However, between 16-22 December 2020, there were 17 deaths, an increase of 55%.

5. These statistics are staggering. They indicate that the COVID-19 situation and the impact of the pandemic in the country has become grave. Therefore, it is our considered view, following broad consultations, that this current situation requires adjustments to our response and preparedness measures. Of greatest concern is the fact that the cases are spread countrywide. This is borne from the fact that most Namibians from all parts of the country, have consistently failed and are failing, to adhere to preventive measures put in place to suppress the spread of the pandemic. Putting it bluntly, failure to comply is putting others at risk of infection and gambling with the lives of Namibians.
6. For this reason, and for the imperative of securing public health and to prevent the public health system from becoming overwhelmed, we need to do what is necessary to reduce further infections. In line with the provisions of the Public and Environmental Health Act of 2015 (Act No. 1 of 2015), Government will introduce amendments to the Public Health Regulations, which were gazette and came into force on 16 December 2020. These measures shall take effect today, the 23 December 2020 at 23:59 until the 13 January 2021 at 24:00. In taking these measures, I am in no way usurping or assuming the power of the President. I am doing so within the power vested in me by the Public and Environmental Health Act of 2015 as Minister responsible for health.

6.1. Public Gatherings

Public gatherings will be limited to a maximum of fifty (50) persons per event. Organizers or hosts of public gatherings shall keep Registers of attendance, recording names and contact numbers. The organisers must ensure that attendees sanitize their hands, wear masks properly and maintain distance of not less than 1.5 meters.

6.2. Restriction of movement

Restriction of movement is imposed between 21:00 and 04:00 for the duration of this period until the 13 January 2021.

6.3. Sale of Alcohol

Sale of alcohol and trading hours operations for on-site consumption (shebeens, bars, nightclubs, gambling houses, casinos and restaurants) is allowed from 09:00-20:00 Mondays to Saturdays. No sale of alcohol is allowed on Sundays and Public Holidays.

6.4. Compulsory correct wearing of face masks

Wearing of face mask is compulsory for all persons when in public places, including in vehicles, aircraft and other means of public transport.

6.5. Business premises and operations

All businesses, including informal markets are required to ensure that all their patrons or persons present in their premises sanitize their hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizers, alternatively, they wash their hands with soap and water.

7. As more information comes to light, so must we adjust our approaches, Standard Operating Procedures and Policies dealing with various matters related to COVID-19. In this context, I wish to announce the following changes to our SOPs.

7.1. Burial of Persons who succumb to COVID-19

The period within which the human remains of persons whose deaths are attributed to COVID-19 is revised from 72 hours to seven (7) days. This is in keeping with our commitment to ensure that families are able to mourn and give their loved ones dignified burials. Such burials must be conducted in line with strict requirements for effective infection control and prevention in order to reduce the risk of infection.

7.2. Validity period of COVID-19 PCR test results for travel purposes

It has been a requirement that to be allowed entry into the country, non-Namibian travelers should present a negative COVID-19 test result that is not older than 72 hours. The period of 72 hours is reckoned from the time the sample was taken. This period of validity is now extended to a period of seven (7) days.

8. Penalties

The Public and Environmental Health Act makes provision for stiff penalties in the event of transgression of its provisions. The maximum penalty under this Act is N\$100 000 or 10 years imprisonment. The Minister of Justice will elaborate on this aspect. However, we appeal on the public to practice voluntary compliance in order to make the imposition of penalties unnecessary.

Fellow Namibians!

9. The second wave of COVID-19 pandemic currently unfolding in our country poses a serious threat to us all. It will require a common and united front for us to stem the tide. If we do not stand together to confront this enemy, the avalanche of positive cases, seriously ill compatriots and dying countrymen and women will overwhelm us. The choice is ours to make. Do we continue to ignore the preventive measures and face ghastr consequences, or do we change course now, while we still have time, and protect our country from certain devastation? This is the stark choice facing our nation. We, as Namibians, must make the call. I am confident that we will make the right choice.

10. As I pointed out at one of our COVID-19 Briefings at this venue, *“on our part as Government, we will continue to do our very best to serve our people to the best of our abilities. We ask for full co-operation from members of the public in order to effectively carry out our duties of safeguarding the health of our people”*. I reiterate these words particularly this time of the dangerous second wave of the COVID-19 that has descended upon our country.

12. His Excellency, The President has promised that if our conduct does not improve and the epidemiological situation in the country becomes worse, he shall feel obliged to impose more stringent measures. It is only us who can prevent that by voluntarily complying with these measures.
13. We have been successful in our fight against Covid-19 due to the cooperation from the public. I commend you for this understanding. As we are approaching Christmas allow me to wish you a Pleasant Christmas and a Rewarding New Year 2021.

I thank you.