

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**STATEMENT BY DR. KALUMBI SHANGULA ON THE OCCASION OF THE 26th
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.**

30 MARCH 2021

**STATE HOUSE
WINDHOEK**

**Check 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 Dr Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Co-operation
Honourable Ministers
Senior Government Officials
Members of the Media
Fellow Countrymen and Women

1. We are, once again, gathered here at State House to inform the nation about the latest developments in our ongoing battle against the COVID-19 pandemic and also to share information regarding adjustments to the Public Health Regulations, that were announced on the 24 February 2021 and which will expire at mid-night tonight. As our President stated, the measures that will come into force at mid-night tonight will expire on 30 April 2021. I will say more about these measures later in my statement.
2. It has been just over one year since COVID-19 landed on our shores. During these past 12 months, we have learnt and continue to learn valuable lessons from our experiences and activities with the National COVID-19 Response and Preparedness. We have demonstrated that when we stand together, we are able to overcome any obstacle, however formidable it may be. COVID-19 was declared a formidable epidemic. It came with ferocious speed, leaving precious little time to prepare. However, our people, especially the frontline health workers rose to the occasion. They worked long hours, day and night on week days, on weekends and during holidays. Their hard work made sure that the pandemic did not overwhelm our country. Indeed, these compatriots have recorded and achieved commendable successes that our nation must be proud of.
3. Despite the successes recorded, COVID-19 is still among us. It remains a real threat to the health and lives of Namibians. It is for this reason that we cannot let our guard down. We cannot lower our defenses. This is especially true as we approach the Easter long weekend and the coming winter season.
4. I wish to take this opportunity to appraise the nation on some key points as to where the country is currently with respect to our COVID-19 national response and preparedness. Generally, our country has fared reasonably well in terms of preparing for and responding to the pandemic. We were able to put in place the required physical infrastructure, procure medical equipment and Personal Protective Equipment, hire health professionals and other personnel, both in temporary and permanent positions, provide public education and bring on board various stakeholders to contribute to this important national effort.
5. The public health measures we have put in place have guided our response overall, and the behavior of our people during this national health emergency. We cannot over-emphasize the fact that these measures are designed with two critical imperatives in mind. First, is the critical need to protect the health and lives of our people, and second, to safeguard their livelihoods. Taking cognizance of this, we have repeatedly called on our people to observe and comply with the public health measures in order to suppress the

spread of this deadly virus. Although these calls have been heeded to a larger extent, there have been too many instances where many our people have put themselves, their loved ones and the community at risk of infection because of failure to comply with public health measures.

6. This has led to a situation where the epidemiological curve has not assumed a downward trajectory to the levels where we can say, our country is out of the woods, as far as COVID-19 infections, related illnesses and deaths are concerned. In other words, we are still far from sustainably flattening the curve. This must be a great concern for all of us. It is thus incumbent upon all of us to do our part and to ensure that, together we defeat the COVID-19 pandemic and return our country to normalcy.
7. At present, the number of new infections remains high. Infections are being reported on a daily basis from all regions around the country. The Basic Reproductive Ratio (R_0), or the rate at which a single infection multiplies or give rise to other new infections, stands at 1.23 for the Epidemiological Week 12 or the week from 22nd to 28th March 2021. For Epidemiological Week 11 (15th to 25th March) the Basic Reproductive Ratio (R_0) stood at 1.43. Ideally, the Basic Reproductive Ratio (R_0) should be less than 1. This would signify that a new infection is not breeding new infections. These Basic Reproductive Ratios indicate that COVID-19 transmission in our communities is continuing to spread and calls for greater vigilance and compliance from all of us.
8. On 24 February 2021, during the last Briefing I stated that the statistics at our disposal tell us that more remains to be done to prevent new infections and the resultant illnesses and deaths. As of 30 March 2021, Namibia has recorded 520 deaths attributable to COVID-19. In this respect, we have overshot the number of 396 COVID-19 deaths as estimated in the WHO Africa Region disease projection model for March 2021. Worryingly, we have also witnessed increased numbers of persons with severe COVID-19 illnesses in different parts of the country. As a result, there is increasing pressure on the number of available Isolation and Intensive Care Unit beds in the country.
9. After analyzing available data and statistics, both the National COVID-19 Monitoring Team and the National Health Emergency Management Committee met and made recommendations on the adjustments to the public health regulations that will expire at midnight tonight.
10. I will outline the proposed amendments to the Regulations, which will enter into force at midnight tonight and expire at midnight on 30 April 2021. The amended Regulations will remain in force for 4 weeks. They will come into operation at 00:00 on 1st April 2021 and expire at 24:00 on 30th April 2021. I shall mention mostly the amendments to the existing regulations. Where no amendment is mentioned, the Regulation remain in force as gazetted.

REGULATIONS	PROPOSED AMENDMENT/RECOMMENDATION
Regulation No. 4: <i>Gatherings, Curfew and measure related to education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permitted public gatherings will be increased from the current number of 50 to 100 persons per event, whether the event is held indoor and outdoor. • Hosts, organizers and instigators of public gatherings must keep registers to record attendants. • Seating arrangements at public gatherings to comply with social distance requirements.
Regulation No. 4A (2). <i>Curfew</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The curfew remains in force from 22:00 to 04:00.
Regulation No. 4 B: <i>Education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not mandatory for children aged 0 to 5 years to wear masks at school.
Regulation No. 5: <i>Restrictions relating to liquor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • License holders are allowed to sell alcohol up to 22:00 on Mondays to Saturdays. • No sale of alcohol is permitted on Sundays and Public Holidays.
Regulation No. 8: <i>Restrictions relating to entry into Namibia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning Namibian citizens or Permanent Residence Permit holders with a valid De-isolation Certificate from the Government of the country of departure will not be subjected to quarantine upon entry, despite status of results. Non Namibians must present a negative PCR or antigen test result.
Regulation No. 9: <i>Quarantine and COVID-19 testing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Namibian studying abroad will be exempt from paying for COVID-19 tests upon entry or departure. Proof to this effect must be provided. • Frequent travelers returning within three days following their departure from Namibia are allowed to re-enter the country using the negative SARS COV-2 PCR or Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Test (AgRDT) test result they used on departure. • However, a returning frequent traveler who spends more than three (3) days outside Namibia will be required to present either an SARSCOV-2 PCR or AgRDT negative test result, without which such traveler will be subject to quarantine. • Negative Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Test (AgRDT) results for incoming travelers will be accepted at Points of Entry into Namibia.
Regulation No. 16: <i>COVID-19 related deaths and Burials</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The embalming of human remains of persons who died of notifiable infectious diseases for transportation purpose is allowed provided that it is done by a trained person and provided that infection control measures are in place.

11. Procurement of COVID-19 Vaccines for Namibia

- 11.1. The Government is working hard to secure and procure COVID-19 vaccines for the country. In addition to ongoing engagements with the COVAX Facility, we have reached out to the Africa Medicines Supply Platform (AMSP) as well as manufacturers of vaccines in China, Russian Federation, India and United States of America, to secure more Covid-19 doses. We aim to vaccinate between 60 and 80 percent of the population in order to achieve the required levels of herd immunity. Namibia welcomes the development announced yesterday for African countries to access the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to be produced in South Africa.
- 11.2. The COVAX Facility has indicated that the doses allocated to Namibia will arrive in the country over the next three weeks. Through innovative approaches, consultations are ongoing to bring on board resources from the registered private medical aid funds to contribute to the procurement of COVID-19 vaccines. The aim is to make it possible for members and dependents to receive vaccination through their medical aid funds. The Ministry is also working on a framework to facilitate the importation of COVID-19 vaccines by entities, other than the Ministry of Health and Social Services. More on this initiative will be communicated and shared with the public in due course.

12. Roll-out of COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign.

- 12.1. On 16 March 2021, Namibia received the first batch of COVID-19 vaccine in the form of a donation of 100,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine from the Government of the Peoples Republic of China. Namibia also received 30,000 doses of the Covishield vaccine from the Government of India. The Sinopharm vaccine was rolled-out on 19 March 2021, while Covishield will be rolled out tomorrow as part of Phase 1 of our COVID-19 vaccination campaign. Phase 2 will commence on 19 April 2021.
- 12.2. I have been receiving numerous questions from the media about the recent mission to Geneva to conduct the Special Session of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) from 24 to 25 March 2021. I wish to use this opportunity to share some of the highlights of the mission. The Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) is the governing body of UNAIDS. Namibia is the current Chair of the PCB. The PCB guides, reviews and makes decisions about the policies, priorities, long-term plans, and budgets of UNAIDS.
- 12.3. The meeting was addressed by the Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and also by Ms. Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS. The Director General recognized Namibia's leadership in the negotiations on the Global AIDS Strategy, 2021- 2026 and for its work with Australia in co-facilitating the 2021 High-Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS.
- 12.4. He stated that WHO is pleased to endorse the Global AIDS Strategy for the next five years and supports its framing, ambition and content. He joined the Executive Director in asking Member States to endorse the strategy with consensus as it is clear that the world needs to intensify efforts to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. The adoption of the Global AIDS Strategy by consensus is a notable feat, attributable to the astute and skillful facilitation of the discussion and negotiations.

13. I thank the people of Namibia for the understanding and cooperation in observing public health measures. I commend the law enforcement officers for their tireless efforts to ensure compliance with the public health measures. With the addition of vaccination to our arsenal, we are optimistic that we shall prevail over Covid-19.

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