

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



THE PRESIDENCY

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB

**ON THE OCCASSION OF THE 34th COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING ON
THE NATIONAL RESPONSE MEASURES**

14 SEPTEMBER 2021

WINDHOEK

Checked Against Delivery

Good morning, Fellow Namibians.

COVID-19 continues to be a grave public health threat to our country. Despite some reprieve, we cannot afford to let our collective and individual guards down. However, the last 31 days have offered our country and communities some respite. The country has now recorded a cumulative number of one-hundred-and-twenty-six-thousand-three-hundred-and-forty-one (126,341) confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Of these, 96 percent have recovered and 2,7 percent of cases lost their lives. During the period under review, the death rate declined by 85 percent, nationally. However, the case fatality ratio in Omaheke region remains high at 6.3 percent, which is two times the national case fatality rate.

These numbers represent lives of mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, children, spiritual, traditional, business, public and community leaders and members. Our country has lost some of its best brains, productive citizens and nation-builders. We have also lost and continue to lose a generation of elders, who possess cultural and indigenous knowledge and wisdom. A vacuum has been left by COVID-19 which we must all now endeavour to fill.

The positivity ratio has declined from 24 percent to 10 percent. The regions which recorded the highest reduction in new infections are Kavango East by 91 percent, Zambezi by 87 percent, Khomas by 82 percent and Erongo region with a 78 percent drop in new cases, respectively. This notable descent on the Incidence Curve must remain everyone's priority and responsibility. We must all work together in order to suppress further transmission of the virus in our country.

Testing continues to be an important and effective pillar in our national response, enabling the early detection of clusters and community transmission and appropriate

measures to limit exposure. Namibia's testing coverage remains high, with a ratio of 266 persons tested per 100,000 people in the country.

Fellow Namibians,

The vaccination campaign is making encouraging progress. So far, up to 13,9 percent fully vaccinated coverage has been recorded in Khomas region; 12,6 percent in Hardap region and 11,9 and 11,8 percent in Erongo and Kavango West regions, respectively.

The most vulnerable segments, such as the elderly and persons with co-morbidities, have been vaccinated to a greater extent. However, uptake by Health Care Workers remains lower in comparison, with only 14.5 percent fully vaccinated.

During the period, we recorded an average vaccine uptake rate of 3,556 doses per day. National vaccination coverage currently stands at 15.1 percent of population for those who have received their 1st dose, while 9 percent of the population, today, are fully vaccinated. This is a long shot from the requisite 60 percent total population coverage target to achieve Herd Immunity by March 2022. I implore all eligible Namibians to come forward and get vaccinated. Vaccination remains one of the effective measures in our national response to avert serious illness and death from COVID-19.

When the Government developed the National COVID-19 Vaccination and Deployment Plan earlier this year, we adopted the principle of voluntary vaccination. The aim of that approach was to encourage vaccine uptake on a voluntary basis. Of recent, there has been broad discussion on different platforms about mandatory vaccination. It has also been reported that some employers are making it a requirement for their employees to get vaccinated. This does not change the position adopted by Government. As such, to date, vaccination in Namibia remains voluntary.

It must be emphasized that COVID-19 is evolving and the measures to combat it effectively must, as a matter of necessity, also evolve to be robust and dynamic. In this regard, Government is considering available options on how to protect our people, to overcome COVID-19 as a public health threat and return our country to normalcy. Discussions in this regard have commenced and the nation will be informed accordingly.

I express sincere gratitude for the solidarity demonstrated by the Republic of Serbia, who donated 15,000 doses of component 1 of 2, of the Sputnik vaccine. The private sector, Namibians and Development Partners alike, continue to render immense support and contributions, including the augmentation of public health facilities and support with COVID-19 vaccines that have been received in the country, through bilateral and multilateral approaches.

Fellow Namibians,

The nation will recall that two weeks ago, certain amendments were made to the COVID-19 Public Health Regulations in order to relax restrictions related to the sales of alcohol, the operations of certain businesses and the duration of PCR test results to enter Namibia.

These amendments, which were gazetted on 6 September 2021, came about following consultations and engagements with stakeholders in Government, the private sector and business associations. We trust that the amended measures will facilitate business operations and thereby support our quest to safeguard lives, while supporting livelihoods.

During consultations with the business associations, undertakings were made that business owners would put certain measures in place to minimize risk and help prevent the spread of new COVID-19 infections. These include the provision of sanitizing and handwashing stations at shebeens and bars; limitations to the number of players at gambling machines to one person at a time; prevention of overcrowding in shebeens and bars as well as the promotion of vaccination amongst patrons at bars and shebeens. It

has unfortunately been observed that the measures agreed to have not been wholly implemented. We call upon our business people, those in the North who petitioned the Government, to hold their end of the bargain and put the agreed measures in place.

Fellow Namibians,

The current COVID-19 Public Health Regulations will expire at midnight on Wednesday, 15 September 2021. Having reviewed the current COVID-19 public health measures, the following Regulations will come into force for a period of thirty (30) days from Thursday, 16 September 2021 until midnight, Friday, 15 October 2021.

1. Public Gatherings as defined in the Regulations have been adjusted to one hundred and fifty (150) persons per event. The number of spectators at sporting events is permitted, up to 150 spectators per event.
2. The Curfew will be extended to begin from 23:00 to 04:00 daily.
3. Restrictions related to liquor were relaxed mid-way during the current dispensation, to facilitate increased business activity. The measures related to the sale of liquor remain as per amendment of 6 September 2021. This means:
 - a. Where the seller is a holder of an off-sales license, sales may take place from 09:00 until 22:00, Monday to Friday and from 09:00 until 13:00 on Saturday;
 - b. Where the seller is a holder of an on-consumption license (such as Bars, Shebeens, Casinos, Gambling and Betting Houses), the sale of alcohol may take place from 09:00 until 22:00, Monday to Saturday. No sale of alcohol on Sunday and public holidays.
 - c. Where the seller is a holder of an on-consumption license (such as Hotels, Restaurants and Accommodation establishments), the sale of liquor served with meals, is permitted from 09:00 until 22:00, Sunday to Sunday.

4. Burials of persons who succumbed to COVID-19 or whose deaths are COVID-19 related must continue to take place within a period of ten (10) days and all meals must continue to be served, on take away basis. The restriction on the number of persons attending public gatherings capped at 150 persons per gathering applies to mourners only, excluding essential workers.

Fellow Namibians,

A wise man once said, "Habit is a powerful means of advancement, and the habit of eternal vigilance and diligence, rarely fails to bring a substantial reward." For us to continue to advance in our war against COVID-19, we must maintain the habit of eternal vigilance and diligence. Let us be weary of "Caution Fatigue", and not fall into a false sense of security. It is true that as the pandemic wears on, many of us are eager to return back to the lives we enjoyed before the onset of COVID-19. I am aware that many people are relaxing their safety practices and returning to old routines. However, to let down our guards at this juncture will prove costly. COVID-19 still poses a considerable risk and we only need to look around the world at nations that were praised for their efforts to fight the virus only to witness an explosion in infections over the past several weeks. Let us make sure that is not the case in Namibia.

This has been a war of attrition. We have faced some cold and dark months. We have lost so many brothers and sisters along the way, but we are closer to seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. It has not been easy, yet, collectively, as a nation united in purpose and galvanized by our spirit of patriotism, we have continued to move forward. Let us maintain our efforts, let us remain committed and remain resourceful in order to emerge from this difficult chapter in our nation's history and continue to build our Namibian House, one brick at a time.

I now call upon the Ministers of Health and Social Services; Justice and the Attorney General to elaborate on technical issues.

Thank you.