

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



THE PRESIDENCY

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB

ON THE OCCASSION OF THE 38th COVID-19 PUBLIC BRIEFING ON THE NATIONAL
RESPONSE MEASURES

14 December 2021

WINDHOEK

Check Against Delivery

Fellow Namibians,

When the index case of COVID-19 was detected in Namibia on 13 March 2020, very few among us anticipated that 18 months later, our country would still be in this fight with a deadly enemy. Alas, we find ourselves engaged in a protracted war against this invisible enemy. In this Year of Resilience, which is now coming to a close, the devastation caused by COVID-19 in terms of lives lost and negative impacts on our socio-economic architecture has been consequential.

To date, the cumulative number of infections is currently one-hundred-and-thirty-thousand-eight-hundred-and-forty-nine (130,849). Regrettably, three-thousand-five-hundred-and-seventy-eight lives have been lost (3 578). As I have said before, one life lost due to COVID-19, is one life too many. Indeed, the devastating effects of this virus has left a void in our communities, in our families and in our hearts. It is therefore, imperative that we continue holding hands in order to avoid further loss of life and stem what is once again becoming a worrying upward trend in the infection rate.

Due to the high infection rates caused by the Omicron variant, I am told that we are now in the Fourth Wave of the pandemic. There is a rapid increase in the rate of new infections, including a moderate increase in the number of hospitalizations and deaths. Given this turn of events, it is absolutely critical that each and every Namibian should practice absolute vigilance in order for us to curtail the rate of infections.

For those of you who may wish to do so, booster shots are available as a means of bolstering your immunities. While some have already done so, we encourage the public to go for booster doses. Those who initially received AstraZeneca can get the same and also Pfizer as a booster. Pfizer is also administered to both adults and children between the ages of 12-17 years.

As I have stated before, we are part of a Global Village. Each of us, as citizens of this village are expected to act with utmost responsibility. Let us not be the ones to put ourselves and others at risk.

We cannot afford to have a situation where more vaccines, which have been acquired at great cost and effort, are left to languish until they reach expiry date. It is simply unacceptable. The Minister of Health will respond to the social media claims being made about people not being allowed to receive their boosters.

Fellow Namibians,

The facts and scientific evidence before us show that vaccination is one of the courses of action to pursue if we are serious about protecting ourselves against the spread of COVID-19, severe illness and death.

It is unfortunate to observe that vaccine uptake, which remains voluntary and based on personal responsibility in favour of the common good, has been slow. As a country, we are far from the goal of herd immunity, which we have set for ourselves several months ago. In that vein, I once again call on you to go out and get vaccinated in order to protect yourselves, your loved ones and your fellow citizens.

This is particularly important ahead of the festive season when many are likely to be around family and in close proximity with others.

For this reason, I should not plead with you to get vaccinated or to receive booster shots because it is for your own health and that of your fellow citizens. Individual responsibility is paramount in our continuing fight against COVID-19. With the current measures due to expire on 15 December 2021 at midnight, I wish to announce the following measures for the period 16 December 2021 to 15 January 2022:

1. The number of people permitted per public gathering has been adjusted from 500 to not more than 200 persons per event. This number is also applicable to people permitted at sporting events and burials.
2. The Government will not at this stage implement a curfew in order to allow for a better spread of public transportation and movement of persons. However, we encourage the correct wearing of masks in vehicles to avoid the spread of the virus.

The Government through the Ministry of Works and Transport will provide 1 million masks to public transport operators and we urge operators to insist on the correct wearing of masks by passengers.

3. Trading hours for the sale of alcohol remain unchanged but can be revisited if the rate of infections becomes overwhelming. The strict adherence to health protocols and trading hours in accordance with licensing conditions is strongly encouraged and will be enforced thoroughly, by law enforcement.
4. The validity of the PCR results will be reduced to 72 hours from the time the results are produced to the time the individual arrives in Namibia. For travelers (both Namibians and Non-Namibians) who arrive with results older than 72 hours due to delayed flights or boarding, a PCR test is to be conducted immediately upon arrival and are quarantined at own cost. The traveler will be released from quarantine if results are negative. Namibians arriving with positive PCR results, where such traveler has not completed isolation or does not present a de-isolation certificate, such traveler will be subjected to isolation at a facility nearest to the Point of Entry at own cost. Namibian citizens and permit holders may enter the country with or without 72-hour PCR test. Those who arrive without 72 hours PCR negative results will be subjected to quarantine at own cost.

5. The Government will conduct random COVID-19 testing for persons permitted entry into Namibia at Points of Entry and will carry out genome sequencing of the samples that tested positive.

This festive season will be pivotal in our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic – and we must therefore change our conduct. The virus cannot spread in the absence of specific human actions. Therefore, the actions we take and our behavioural patterns will either derail or aid our efforts to defeat COVID-19. In light of this, I urge all Namibians to avoid unnecessary travel, movement and risky behaviour during the next several weeks.

I should caution that the Government will spare no effort to place further restrictions in order to safeguard the health of our nation, which has been the first priority since the onset of COVID-19. We will therefore continue to marshal resources to fight COVID-19 and we shall do so with the same determination we have demonstrated as a Government over the past 18 months. Through better coordination and collaboration with all stakeholders we have been able to arrest the spread of the disease during the Third Wave, which lasted from May 2021 to September 2021. Our economy and health system cannot afford a deadly Fourth Wave caused by individual or collective recklessness.

Fellow Namibians,

In a few days, we will enter the festive season, which is a period of love, compassion and giving. It is a season to be thankful and a season to celebrate the joy of family, community and kinship. Let us open our hearts to one another, hold hands and ensure that we work as One Namibia and One Nation, to eradicate the scourge of COVID-19 from our homes and communities. The future of our physical and economic wellbeing depends on the actions we, as a collective, take today.

We can ill afford another dark season of high infections, illness, hospitalizations and death. Therefore, I once again reiterate individual responsibility, of which the main defense against COVID-19 is vaccination, social distancing, correct wearing of masks and hand hygiene.

Together, we have to summon the will to defeat COVID-19 by doing what is right for our fellow citizens and country. Together, we have to be resilient and summon the will to ensure we keep infections and hospitalizations low, and that we reduce the death rates to zero. Together we must ensure that through decisive and responsible action we can save jobs and protect our economy so that once more, we can restart our journey of sustainable development and prosperity.

In our fight against COVID-19, we have been able to achieve a lot through collaboration and partnership. We have done so through selfless sacrifice and dedication to collective pursuits instead of individual needs. Let us continue and not lose our zeal. We should sustain our gains and momentum. I therefore call on all of you once again to join Government in the fight against COVID-19 during the Fourth Wave of the Pandemic. Together, we can surmount the pandemic and enter into a new dawn of hope, opportunity and countless possibilities. I thank you.

I now call on the Minister of Health and Social Services to provide further technical details.