

Shangula: Worst is yet to come

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April 16,
2020



Health minister Dr Kalumbi Shangula has warned there is worse still to come before the country turns the corner against the Covid-19 outbreak. Speaking yesterday at the Covid-19 communication centre in Windhoek, Shangula reiterated even though there is a public irritation at the government's stay-at-home advice, a full lockdown was necessary to contain the spread of the virus and save lives of Namibians.

"Covid-19 does not go around looking for people. It is people who move around looking for Covid-19, without them knowing so," Shangula said.

He said the country cannot afford to rest on its laurels in the efforts to flatten the curve. Namibia has 16 confirmed cases of Covid-19 thus far.

Shangula also said the country revised its Covid-19 testing strategy and the aim is to "test as many people as our capacity can allow".

"Covid-19 is a new virus and we did not have the capacity to do tests on Covid-19 because it never existed. We built up local capacity with NIP gradually. We then put up criteria as to who can be tested. The initial criteria were focused on those suspected of

having Covid-19. This was because by then, NIP did not have much capacity to test almost everybody who needed to be tested,” Shangula said.

Shangula partly attributed a delay in ramping up testing of Covid-19 on a shortage of chemical reagents. He said there was a need to preserve the necessary reagents in the country because there is an international lack of supply.

“Currently, we are in a position to do 96 tests per run because of the criteria that we have put up. Number two, we also have to preserve the little reagents that we have at the moment. There is a scarcity of this reagent. Transport has been stopped and it is no longer easy to get things to Namibia. But I must say that we have now revised our criteria and will do more tests as much as possible. We are going to focus on hotspots because the reagents that we have are not enough for everybody.”

The health authorities have carried out about 500 tests since the first infections were detected in the country on 13 March. Earlier in the week, Shangula said a lot still needs to be done to curb the spread of coronavirus, which has now claimed over 126 000 lives globally, while over two million have tested positive.

“Notwithstanding the noteworthy performance by Namibia, the job is not yet done. We are facing a new disease of which much is still to be learned and to be understood. Covid-19 is characterised by high intensity of transmission, extremely low immunity of the population, abundance of infective and susceptible individuals, and wide geographical distribution,” he said.

On Tuesday, President Hage Geingob announced the extension of the current lockdown until 4 May, with government banning with effect from 18 April all unnecessary transport and movement of people throughout the country.

Firm... Dr Kalumbi Shangula

Photo: Emmency Nuukala

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