

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



THE PRESIDENCY

STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT HAGE G. GEINGOB ON THE
OCCASION OF 37th COVID-19 BRIEFING: DETECTION OF THE OMICRON VARIANT
IN NAMIBIA

06 December 2021

WINDHOEK

**Check against Delivery*

Honourable Ministers,
Members of the Media,
Fellow Countrymen and Women,

Over a week ago, on 24 November 2021, diligent scientists and talented medical professionals from our neighboring sister country, South Africa identified a new Covid-19 variant. Befittingly, we owe these men and women a debt of gratitude for their research excellence in identifying this new variant, which has since been code-named Omicron and listed as a variant of concern by the World Health Organization.

Unfortunately, instead of applauding this outstanding achievement by African scientists, certain countries and regions of the world have responded with knee-jerk measures in the form of counterproductive travel bans against our region. The global fight against Covid-19 demands multilateral collaboration, coordination and consultations between nations, and not divisions between regions and citizens. It is in that vein that I call for an end to unnecessary travel bans, which undermine economic recovery; and are not rooted in scientific rigor.

We should come together as ONE world and ONE global village to defeat the common enemy Covid-19.

Fellow Namibians,

It was only a matter of time before we could detect the Omicron variant in our country through the capacities for Genome Sequencing that we have developed at the University of Namibia and across our Health System. Regrettably, I am told by our specialists that we have been able to detect 18 cases of the Omicron variant in Namibia, of which the evidence before us suggests easier spread, concerning multiple mutations and reinfection. Going forward, Namibia will continue to strengthen surveillance and response, including immediate contact tracing of close contacts to contain the circulation of this new variant. It is not a time to panic - but to be vigilant as we put in place measures to deal with this new Covid-19 variant.

As a country, we have thus far learned important lessons in the fight against Covid-19. However, the Minister of Health and Social Services will provide more technical details. The actions we have undertaken allowed us to keep new infections extremely low and the death rates also declined accordingly for a period of three months. Prior to the discovery of the Omicron variant, we recorded days without any cases of deaths, and at times no new cases reported.

As we close another difficult year, the Year of Resilience, which tested our resolve as a nation, I have to make a clarion call to the nation. We shall not defeat this deadly virus if we don't take individual responsibility in this fight and in favor of the common good. Covid-19 is transmitted by human beings and the pandemic is killing largely those who are unvaccinated people. Those of you who are not vaccinated are undermining the efforts of Government in defeating this deadly virus.

Those of you among us who are not vaccinated are reversing the gains we have made in the fight against Covid-19. Those among us who are not respecting the health protocols in place and refusing to wear masks and practice social distancing are reversing the gains we have made in our fight against Covid-19. In other parts of the world, stringent measures are being imposed on individuals who are not vaccinated. In some instances, measures are being devised to put unvaccinated persons in mandatory lockdowns with limitations on their movement and socio-economic activity.

Our vaccination campaign has been voluntary, placing more responsibility on individual citizens to act and to think about the common good. Unfortunately, we are not being responsible, placing more risks on others by refusing to get vaccinated based on arguments that have no basis in science. Vaccines are safe. Human beings have always been vaccinated against different forms of illnesses, be it polio, measles, chicken pox and many other diseases.

I have been alarmingly informed about essential workers, including cross-border truck drivers who are refusing to get vaccinated, placing a huge burden on our economy. People are getting angry because neighboring Botswana is imposing vaccine mandates on those who are passing through their borders. Botswana is not stopping individuals from travelling through the country, but is merely asking for vaccination passports. The point is, just get vaccinated. The refusal to accept the vaccine mandate is an unacceptable state of affairs.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia has bought thousands of doses of vaccines from manufacturers and through the COVAX Facility. We have also received multiple donations of vaccines from friendly countries. These vaccines are available countrywide. Therefore, it is highly regrettable that we are forced to destroy in excess of 150 000 vaccines, which have reached expiry date because those who are eligible are refusing to be vaccinated. Instead of throwing away vaccines, citizens who wish to go for booster jabs are encouraged to do so.

On 15 December 2021, based on the evolving health situation we may announce new measures to fight against Covid-19. If we don't change our habits, the Government will be left with no choice and with no option, but to take stricter measures ahead of the festive season. It is not a desirable course of action. However, if the cases continue to rise and the citizens don't change their behavior, it will be the only sensible thing to do.

Protecting the health of our nation has always been the priority since the onset of this pandemic and the Government will not hesitate to impose new measures in the interest of our nation.

Let us get vaccinated, let us continue to wear masks, let us practice social distancing and let us respect the measures put in place to defeat Covid-19 in our country.

I thank you