



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**STATEMENT BY DR. KALUMBI SHANGULA (MP), MINISTER OF HEALTH  
AND SOCIAL SERVICES ON THE OCCASION OF A PRESS BRIEFING ON  
COVID-19 OUBREAK**

**11 MARCH 2020**

**WINDHOEK**

*\*Check Against Delivery*

Director of the Programme,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Members of the Media,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good morning and welcome to the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Thank you for honouring our invitation to come here so that we can inform and update the nation with information on the Covid-19 outbreak.

### **Background**

2. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government of Namibia undertook to provide information to the nation on regular basis. This is to be done either through press conferences or press erleases. This morning, I am pleased to share with the nation latest information on COVID-19 as it relates to our country. The outbreak started in Wuhan, Hubei Province in China in January 2020. The disease is characterised by fever of more than 38<sup>0</sup>C, cough and difficulties in breathing. The outbreak has now affected 104 countries, around the world. As of the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020, confirmed coronavirus cases stood at 113 702 globally with 4 012 deaths.
3. In Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Senegal, South Africa, Cameroon, Nigeria and Togo have confirmed cases, most of which are imported. Only Egypt, Algeria and Cameroon have reported cases that are locally transmitted.
4. Namibia continues to strengthen our preparedness to deal with eventualities that may arise as a result of this outbreak. This includes putting in place capacities for screening and laboratory testing for suspected cases. I wish to inform the nation that in addition to screening capacities at our ports of entry, the Namibia Institute of Pathology is able to carry out confirmatory tests for COVID-19. The Laboratory has in fact already carried out a total of four (4) tests on suspected cases to date.
5. The capability of the NIP to conduct these tests places Namibia among a few African countries that conduct such tests domestically. We highly appreciate and are encouraged by the support provided by the Government of the Republic of Namibia towards the ongoing efforts to strengthen our readiness. In fact, only yesterday, the Head of State, His Excellency, Dr. Hage Geingob visited Hosea Kutako International Airport to familiarize himself with the setup of our screening systems and isolation facilities as well the Military Field Hospital deployed at the Hosea Kutako International Airport. We are also enthused by the cooperation of the different Offices/Ministries and Agencies, as well as development co-operation partners who continue to participate in our efforts to ensure readiness at all levels.
6. Much has been said about the mass repatriation of about 500 Namibians who are currently in China. I wish to re-emphasise that it is not advisable to repatriate such a large number of persons into the country at once. This is because such an action goes against the advice and recommendations from the WHO regarding the exportation and

importation of the disease into countries. The Government has adopted a position that it is more prudent to provide support to our citizens in China at locations where they are instead of repatriating them *en masse*. This is also a measure adopted out of abundance of caution, in order to avoid the risk of our people contracting infection *en route* or during the voyage. I must add that this does not mean that Namibians in China or in any affected country are prohibited from traveling back home, out of their own volition. Screening procedures will apply, and such persons will be advised on how to conduct themselves in line with the precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to above all, safeguard the health of our communities and our nation at large. Any Namibian from any part of the world may travel back at any point of their choice. We call for the understanding of all Namibians, families and friends, who are affected by these measures.

7. I wish to assure the nation that our surveillance and screening measures are proving effective as evidenced by the number of suspected cases being attended to. As of yesterday, nine (9) suspected cases were recorded. Two (2) in Luderitz, two (2) in Rehoboth; four (4) in Windhoek, and one (1) at Onandjokwe. There were also two cases of false alarm that were reported at Okahandja and Oranjemund. Specimen of two of the cases in Windhoek were sent for testing to the National Institute of Communicable Diseases in South Africa. The results came out negative. Four cases tested by NIP, namely from Luderitz and Rehoboth came out negative. Specimen for the Onandjokwe case are awaited. I want to underscore that our surveillance systems reliable and that Namibia has no confirmed COVID-19 case to date.
8. I wish to specifically advise medical professionals to ensure that diagnosis of suspected cases is done prudently and with the necessary diligence so that only specimen from cases that meet the Standard Case Definition of coronavirus are sent for confirmatory tests by the laboratories. This will also ensure the economic utilisation of resources as we strengthen our preparedness against this threat. As the WHO has cautioned, not every runny nose or cough would qualify to be regarded as a candidate for coronavirus infection. May I also caution members of the public to exercise caution and avoid spreading of sharing unsubstantiated information about suspected COVID-19 cases. It is imperative that any information about suspected cases, laboratory tests results are communicated through official channels. Spreading unconfirmed or unsubstantiated information causes unnecessary alarm among members of the public and undermines the effectiveness of our interventions.

### **Government Response**

8. Government has implemented interventions for COVID-19 preparedness. The World Health Organization has called on countries to strengthen their preparedness. The following are some of the measures that Namibia has taken:
  - 8.1. Namibia Institute of Pathology (NIP) is now capacitated to conduct the COVID-19 confirmatory test locally.
  - 8.2. Standard Operation Procedures have been developed and a simulation exercise is planned for next week.

- 8.3. Multi-sectoral National Health Emergency Management Committee (NHEMC) was strengthened and is now chaired by the Executive Director of Ministry of Health and Social Services. The NHEMC is meeting bi-weekly to monitor the situation.
- 8.4. All fourteen regions have participated in the training for COVID-19 preparedness and response. The Government, in collaboration with key stakeholders conducted a national training of trainers (ToT) on COVID-19. These trainers have been deployed to the regions in order to train health workers and stakeholders for COVID-19 preparedness and response.
- 8.5. The Government procured and dispatched Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to all 14 regions.
- 8.6. A toll-free number has been opened for members of the public to receive necessary information on coronavirus disease and to communicate any queries to the relevant authority. The Toll-Free Number is **0800100100**.
- 8.7. The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) is also operational.
- 8.8. The Ministry has appointed the Incident Manager for Covid-19.

#### **COVID-19 Response in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)**

9. Namibia is co-ordinating our response with SADC Region Members States on an ongoing basis. Some of the activities include:
  - 9.1. Namibia participated in the SADC Ministers of Health Emergency COVID-19 Meeting which was held on 9 March 2020 in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. This meeting recommended temporary suspension of SADC Regional face-to-face meetings and encouraged the use of Information Communication Technology such as video-conferencing, webinars and Skype calls for holding such meeting, until the situation has been contained. **As for Namibia, all gatherings involving international participants must be conducted within the ambit of this decision.**
  - 9.2. The meeting also agreed that Member States establish coherent mechanisms of sharing information on issues of transboundary public health concern, and that the Technical Committee for Coordinating and Monitoring the implementation of SADC Protocol on Health comprising of Directors of Public Health and Directors of medical Services must be established.
  - 9.3. The meeting urged Member States to put in place and implement COVID-19 National Preparedness and Response Plans as well as contingency funds to address gaps in prevention, impact mitigation and other interventions. Namibia's COVID-19 Response Plan is in place.
10. Namibia participates in the weekly conference calls organized by SADC for updates and support, and

11. Namibia continue to benefit from training, jointly organised by CDC-Africa and WHO, to help countries in COVID-19 preparedness and response. As we speak, two of our Doctors are being trained in Zambia on case management.
12. The general public is still advised to adhere to the following measures as part of prevention measures.
  - Regular hand washing with soap and water or Alcohol Hand Rub when hands not visibly dirty.
  - Covering mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or cloth when coughing or sneezing. Travellers with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette and limit contact with others
  - Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing, keep a distance of one step (meter).
  - Minimise or avoid public gatherings.
  - Thorough cooking of meat, poultry, seafood and eggs.
  - Drink plenty of fluids and do regular exercise.
  - Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands if in contact with sick person or with potentially infected surfaces or objects.
  - People should seek immediate treatment if infection is suspected, or if symptoms occur (*severe flu-like illness with recent travel history from affected countries in the past 14 days or contact with person from affected countries who is reported to be infected with the COVID-19*)
  - Based on currently available information, the World Health Organization does not recommend any restriction of travel or trade. However, Namibian citizens are cautioned to reduce non-essential travel to affected countries.
13. I invite the private health sector (doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals) to join us in the response efforts against covid-19. I am encouraged by citizens who took the initiative to join us and offer their services on voluntary basis. The public sector has a role to play. Join the fight. Shy away from propagating false information on coronavirus through social media and other platforms. Our contact numbers are (061) 2032054 or 203 2423/2150 for any information on coronavirus.
14. **Please do remember that prevention is better than cure!**