



**Republic of Namibia**

# **PRESS STATEMENT**

**BY**

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**Minister of Health and Social Services**

**UPDATE ON PANDEMIC INFLUENZA A H1N1 2009  
IN NAMIBIA**

**20 AUGUST 2009**

**16h30**

Programme Director, Dr. Jack Vries, Chairperson of the NHEMC,  
MoHSS

WHO Representative, Dr. Magda Robalo & Dr. Lawson Ahadzie

Members of the Media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

**O**n the 20 July 2009, I briefed you on our first case of Pandemic Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 in Namibia. It is now exactly one month later and the situation has evolved to the extent that we now have 22 confirmed cases to date.

**T**he objective of this Press conference is to update the Nation on the status of the pandemic in Namibia and to advise on measures to be taken to prevent individuals and families from getting infected and passing on the disease to others.

**W**hile acknowledging the concerns of the Nation, I would like to appeal that this subject should not be politicized. It should remain in the hands of technical experts under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Services and its stakeholders.

**W**e are now faced with local transmission – meaning that you do not need to travel abroad to get infected, as the virus is already circulating in Namibia. This calls for us to jointly re-double our efforts on prevention. Therefore, we need cooperation on preventative measures. According to WHO, there are no travel restrictions to be imposed, because it is a measure that serves no purpose: it does not protect the public nor contain the outbreak.

**W**e cannot predict how the situation will evolve in Namibia, hence the need to closely investigate the cases that are occurring, so that we get a better understanding of the epidemic in Namibia. As you know, this is a new virus and the entire world is still learning about it.

**W**e also know from other countries that have been affected so far that the overwhelming majority of those affected continue to experience mild symptoms and recover fully, without the need for medical care. Relatively few people have died of the disease. This point should be stressed to everyone.

**I**n most countries, the majority of pandemic H1N1 2009 cases are still occurring in younger people. The number of cases in Namibia although representing a concern, is still too little for us to define an age trend, but we are looking into it.

**G**roups at risk of severe or fatal illness, includes pregnant women, and those with underlying medical conditions.

**I**t has also been observed that a small number of otherwise healthy people, usually under the age of 50 years, experience very rapid progression to severe and fatal illness.

**I**n our setting, health workers can be at an increased risk, that's why we are enforcing infection control measures in all health facilities, in line with WHO guidelines.

**W**hat did I mean when I said the nation should not panic? I meant that we have put in place:

- A Preparedness and Response measures;
- Health Personnel were trained;
- Logistics was put in place (Antivirals and diagnostic swabs were acquired) and distributed to district hospitals;
- Leaflets and brochures were developed, printed and distributed to inform the public about the pandemic H1N1 2009;
- Capacity is being built at NIP and we are exploring ways of establishing diagnostic capacity here in Namibia, to minimize the delays of sending the specimens to South Africa;

**I** would like here to take this opportunity to thank NICD in South Africa for the good collaboration we are having on this matter.

**I** call on stakeholders and line-ministries especially, the Ministry of Education to come on board. In fact, each institution, public or private must have a contingency plan to deal with the pandemic.

**We** now have to seize this opportunity, since the schools are going on recess, to appeal to the parents that their little ones should be confined indoors when they become sick with flu like symptoms and seek medical attention if the situation worsens or is serious from onset. Please refer to the available leaflets to get familiar with the symptoms of the disease and when to seek medical attention.

**If** we all observe the preventive measures that are being communicated: cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze; never cough or sneeze into your hands, use a tissue or the crook of your arm; wash your hands regularly with soap and running water; and stay at home if you are having flu like symptoms; we will certainly prevent further spread of the disease.

**S**ome are concerned over the use of masks and I would like to inform you that according to WHO guidelines, the benefits of wearing masks in the community have not been established, especially in open areas, as opposed to enclosed spaces while in close contact with a person with influenza-like symptoms.

**I** am convinced that we will successfully control the spread of the epidemic, but only with cooperation from all levels of the society, the public and private sector, civil society and the population at large.

**I** hereby want to inform the nation that the production of a vaccine is in progress worldwide. I assure the nation that Namibia will benefit from the vaccine as soon as it becomes available. Certainly, not everyone will be vaccinated; we will need to identify the target groups to receive the vaccine and follow WHO's guidance.

**D**r. Jack Vries and his team have been joined by a WHO Epidemiologist, Dr. Lawson Ahadzie and they will be my Team on

the ground and working around the clock to deal with the situation.

**I** Thank You.