



**THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

**PRESS STATEMENT**

**UPDATE ON THE REPOSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**27<sup>th</sup> May, 2021**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. N. Nwesi", written in a cursive style.



**27<sup>th</sup> May 2021:** – The Ministry of Health would like to update the general public on the resurgence situation of COVID-19 in the country and the ongoing vaccination program.

## **OVERVIEW OF COVID-19 IN THE COUNTRY**

As of today, the cumulative number of COVID-19 cases stand at 44,594. Active cases on admission are 194 while cumulative recoveries (home-based care and health facility based) stand at 43,401. Sadly, 361 people have passed on due to COVID-19.

It's obvious from our statistics that the number of cases and deaths are increasing. Our data shows that the most affected age group is 20-39 years old and the intensity of severe and critically ill COVID-19 patients is higher than what we experienced in the 1st wave of the pandemic. In the first wave, it took us 3 - 4 months to get to the full blown pandemic, while in the 2nd wave, it has taken us less than 10 days.

The increase in the number of cases coupled with deaths is largely due to complacency in adhering to the COVID-19 public health prevention measures.

***The districts that have reported the highest number of cases in the last 14 days are; Kampala, Wakiso, Gulu, Amuru, Moroto, Arua, Mbale, Masaka, Oyam and Kalungu. However, this does not mean that the other districts are not affected, the above mentioned districts have been vigilant in carrying out surveillance testing and reporting. The same or even worse could be happening elsewhere.***

  
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This, therefore, calls for vigilance and maximum responsibility from all of us to avoid being another statistic in this deadly pandemic.

### **COVID 19 outbreak in the schools:**

The Ministry has noted a sharp rise in the number of COVID 19 cases in schools. As of 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021, a total of 29 schools from 17 districts, have recorded a total of 803 cases and 01 deaths.

The affected schools include; ten Nursing Schools, eleven Secondary schools, seven Primary schools, one PTC and one tertiary institutions. Some Universities have also reported cases and are under investigations. The main drivers of transmission in schools are overcrowding, non-adherence to SOPs and inadequate supervision of the learners.

I want to appeal to the administrators of the schools to step up vigilance, identify sick learners/ teachers early, enforce adherence to SOPs and report promptly to the nearest health facility for any suspected cases. The teachers/lecturers who are not yet vaccinated are encouraged to take the lifesaving exercise seriously and get vaccinated as soon as possible.

### ***Travelers arriving from highly affected countries***

As previously communicated, based on the current global trend of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health categorized countries in relation to the COVID-19 risk they pose.

The countries have been categorized according to the presence and trends of variants of concern, high rate of transmission of the disease, number of deaths



reported in the past 3 months and vaccination coverage. The categorization is reviewed every week depending on the epidemiological picture of the pandemic globally. Our current review is as below;

### **Category 1**

The only country in Category 1, at the moment, is **India**. All flights from India and all passengers originating from India were suspended effective 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021 at 23:59hrs.

The following flights and travelers from India are exempted from the suspension;

- a) Cargo flights where crew do not disembark
- b) Technical stops where travelers do not disembark
- c) Aircraft in a state of emergency
- d) Operations related to humanitarian aid, medical evacuation and diplomatic flights approved by the Appropriate Authority
- e) Nationals returning home after medical treatment in India

### **Category 2**

Travelers from the USA, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Tanzania.



Any traveler from these countries including Ugandan nationals and residents will be subjected to a PCR COVID-19 test at their own cost at the Points of Entry including Entebbe International Airport.

### **Category 3**

Travelers from the rest of the countries who do not present with symptoms are exempted from the above measures.

### **Exemption from COVID19 testing upon arrival at the airport.**

A growing body of scientific evidence from the Centers for Disease Control of the USA, suggests that fully vaccinated people are less likely to be infected without showing symptoms and potentially less likely to spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to others. As such vaccination is viewed as strong tool to prevent and control the pandemic and many countries worldwide are increasing their vaccination coverage on a daily basis in an attempt to interrupt COVID19 transmission.

Based on this growing evidence, travelers from countries that have achieved a coverage of over 50% of at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine administered who present evidence of full vaccination will be exempt from the mandatory PCR testing at the airport.

Travelers from countries that have **NOT** achieved a coverage of 50% of at least one dose of the vaccine administered will be required to undergo mandatory PCR testing at their own cost upon arrival at the respective border points of entry.



In this regard, travelers from the following category 2 countries; USA, United Kingdom, and United Arab Emirates who are fully vaccinated and are able to present evidence to attest to this will be exempted from the mandatory PCR testing at the points of entry.

### **Testing of incoming travelers at the points of entry**

Testing of incoming travelers including children from countries in Category 1 and 2 commenced on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021, at the Peniel Beach Hotel. Travelers from category 1 and 2 countries are transferred by bus to the Peniel Hotel, 2km away from the airport where sample removal and testing is done.

Ministry of health signed an agreement with the private sector to carry out this exercise in a comfortable environment and provide results within four hours to the clients.

To-date, a total of 4,327 travelers entering the country through Entebbe International airport from Category 1 and 2 countries have undergone mandatory PCR testing for COVID-19. Of these, 50 turned positive and were transferred to the COVID-19 Isolation Units. The confirmed cases originated from 8 countries; UAE (16), South Sudan (15), Kenya (06), USA (06), Eritrea (03), Ethiopia (02), South Africa (01) and Netherlands (01).

The current mandatory testing of travelers from Category 1 and 2 countries has enabled us to curb the importation of variants into the country.



## ***Land Border Points of Entry and Risk for Importation of infection***

Testing of individuals arriving through the land Border Points of Entry without test certificates from recognized laboratories shall continue and may be intensified based on the epidemiological picture of the pandemic

## **COVID-19 Vaccination and Commencement of the Second dose**

Uganda commenced vaccination against COVID-19 on **10<sup>th</sup> March 2021**. To-date, a total of **550,626** people have received the AstraZeneca vaccine. Only minor side effects have been reported by those who have been vaccinated. Uganda has **NOT** registered any case of blood clots which is extremely rare and our scientists continue to monitor this.

The Strategic Committee of COVID-19 of the Ministry of Health in consultation with the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and Vaccine Advisory Committee (VAC) considering the shelf-life of the COVID-19 vaccine in stock, resolved that all persons who received the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine and **have completed between 8 to 12 weeks** should visit any designated vaccination health facility and receive their second dose. ***To this effect, administration of the second dose commenced on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021.*** All those who are eligible are encouraged to ensure they access the vaccine from the nearest vaccination point.

In addition, those who did not receive their first dose and are eligible are also encouraged to go and receive the vaccine so that they are protected against severe disease and death from COVID-19.

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## **Emergency withdrawal of COVID 19 vaccines from the districts**

The Ministry of Health has observed from its records that a number of districts have not fully utilized the doses of the COVID-19 vaccine that was allocated to them, yet this life saving vaccine has a very short shelf life and are due to expire on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021. Some districts mainly in South Western regions have performed very well and have been allocated additional vaccines, while others mainly in the Eastern and Northern regions have performed poorly.

The Strategic Committee sitting on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021, in consultation with the Scientific Advisory Committee and the Vaccine Advisory Committee resolved that vaccines be withdrawn from the poorly performing districts to avoid wastages and expiries and that the exercise should commence on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021. Communication was sent to the Chief Administrative Officers, Chairpersons LCV's, Resident District Commissioners and District Health Officers informing them of this impending withdrawal. A similar sitting that took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021, resolved that unutilized vaccines from **all** districts be withdrawn as an emergency and given to the population most at risk. ***This is again to reiterate that all vaccines that have not been utilized at the districts will be withdrawn with effect from today 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021.***

The district leadership are requested to cooperate with the National Medical stores teams and release all vaccines vials in their possession to these teams. Only 10 vials will be retained by the districts for purposes of giving the second dose to those who are eligible.





The Ministry of health takes note that over 3 months was given to the districts to utilize vaccines allocated to them and vaccinate the highly vulnerable groups including health workers, teachers, security personnel, the elderly above 50 years and those 18 to 50 years with co- morbidities. The vaccines are due to expire on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2021. To avoid such a catastrophe, it's extremely important that we withdraw the vaccines. The Ministry of Health request for maximum cooperation from the district leaders. A district that demonstrates commitment to utilize the doses in their facilities with evidence of good progress may be considered to retain some vaccines vails. Take note that there will be penalties for those that waste vaccines or allow vaccines in their possession to expire yet these are very expensive lifesaving vaccines.

The withdrawn vaccines will be reprogrammed for vaccination of the population in Kampala Metropolitan Area where the infection rate by COVID 19 is high.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the country experiences the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, I urge all of us to religiously follow the scientifically proven prevention and control measures i.e., consistently, and correctly wearing masks while in public, social distancing of at least two meters, avoid crowded places, and always wash hands with soap or use an alcohol-based sanitizer even though you are fully vaccinated.

Data from the previous wave shows that every COVID-19 positive person has between 21-39 contacts. This could be higher for the current wave. Therefore, following the COVID-19 SOPs has never been more important than it is now.



It is our sole responsibility to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Life is precious, be responsible.

***COVID-19 IS REAL, IT'S STILL WITH US AND IT KILLS.***

For God and my Country.

Dr. Henry G. Mwebesa

Director General Health Services

27<sup>th</sup> May 2021