

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**RESPONSE BY DR. KALUMBI SHANGULA TO QUESTIONS RAISED IN THE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY HON. MIKE KAVEKOTORA (RDP).**

25 FEBRUARY 2021

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**Check Against Delivery.*

Hon Speaker
Hon Members

Thank you for granting me the opportunity to take the floor in order to respond to the questions put to me by the Hon Mike Kavekatora of RDP. Most of the information related to Covid-19 vaccine was shared in this House during my Ministerial Statement last week as well as during the 25 Covid-19 Public Briefing yesterday at State House. I will nonetheless respond to the questions in the order that they were put.

Question 1: Can the Minister enlighten this house about the process that your Ministry went through to acquire the vaccine that is to be used in Namibia?

The following progress has been made:

1. Firstly, National COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce was established in August 2020, with clear Terms of References.
2. Cabinet approved funding for Namibia's participation in the COVAX Facility. This commitment amounts to N\$193,014, 360 to procure 1,016, 400 doses of the vaccine for 508, 200 persons (for 2 doses per person) or 20% of the population.
3. Namibia signed a Purchase Agreement to obtain doses of the COVID-19 vaccine from the COVAX Facility on 5 November 2020.
4. An upfront payment of 15% was made from Bank of Namibia to GAVI, on 8 December 2020, amounting to USD\$1 626 240 or N\$ 29 272 320).
5. A Financial Guarantee for settlement of the remaining amount of USD\$9 096 780 or N\$163 742 040 was submitted to GAVI on the 16 December 2020.
6. In January 2021, the Namibia Medicines Regulatory Council developed and published Guidelines for the regulatory approval process of pharmaceutical products, including COVID-19 vaccines.
7. The Ministry developed a costed National COVID-19 Deployment and Vaccination Plan, which received approval by WHO. The WHO rates it as one of the best, giving recognition to our professionals who drafted this Plan. It has been recommended as a template to be used by countries that have yet to complete their plans.
8. The Scientific and Clinical Evaluation Team, under the National COVID-19 Vaccines Taskforce reviewed data from WHO, other stringent regulatory authorities (SRAs) and ongoing clinical trials that have informed the national plans.
9. Namibia has submitted a vaccine allocation form to COVAX Facility for ordering of the first tranche of vaccine.
10. A vaccine allocation form has also been submitted to the African Medical Supply Platform under the auspices of the African Union.
11. Engagement with manufactures and other countries through their diplomatic missions in Namibia to secure additional doses of vaccines has been done. China and India have pledged donations of vaccines to Namibia.
12. Stakeholders and private sector consultations to explore additional avenues to secure resources for the deployment of the vaccine have taken place.

Question 2: What scientific investigation was done in Namibia to ensure we acquire the right vaccine and who conducted the investigation?

Scientific investigation in this regard is the mandate of the Namibia Medicines Regulatory Council (NMRC). The NMRC is responsible for ensuring that medicines produced or imported into the country for human or animal use are safe and efficacious and of acceptable quality, among other things. This scientific investigation entails:

- Review of dossiers from the manufacturers,
- Review of scientific data and clinical trials,
- Review of approval report for emergency use listing from the WHO, and
- Review of reports from stringent regulatory authorities that are aligned with NMRC.

Although Namibia currently does not have the laboratory capacity to evaluate for vaccine effectiveness, the country has just entered into a bilateral agreement with Botswana to share data on effectiveness studies. However, plans are underway to establish genome sequencing capability to detect possible variants in the Namibian population. Results from these studies would also inform us on which vaccine product to choose.

Question 3: What was the outcome of the scientific investigation?

We are expecting the final pronouncement from the NMRC Council by end of this week.

Question 4. How long will it take once vaccinated for one to be immuned from being infected?

The body will take a couple of weeks before it develops immunity against Covid-19. In the interim a person who is exposed to the virus may still contract infection. Therefore it is important to continue to comply with public health measures even after vaccination.

Questions 5 % 6. How long does it take for a vaccinated person not to infect others? Once vaccinated, for how long does one stay immuned?

A person who is vaccinated is expected to be protected from Covid-19 and therefore not infective. The vaccine does not infect that individual with the virus. Subsequently that person is not able to infect others. If there is a failure of vaccine, and the person get infected, he or she can infect others in the same way any unvaccinated person would infect another person.

The phenomenon of immunity is a complex one. The duration of immunity from available vaccines is not yet fully known. However, some studies indicate that immunity could last for 3 to 6 months. Cellular immunity, however, is thought to last for longer than this. It is important to note that the emergence of variants may also influence this immunity to the point where people would have to get vaccinated frequently as with the seasonal influenza vaccines.

In conclusion, a concern was expressed that the vaccines against Covid-19 took a short period to be developed. This should not be a concern. It should be a celebration of the advancement in the medical science and technology. The platforms on which the vaccines were developed have been long in existence. What happened was the adaption of these platforms to the development of the Covid-19 vaccines.

