

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF HEALTH, HONOURABLE KHUMBIZE KANDODO CHIPONDA, MP DURING A PRESS CONFERENCE ON LEVEL 3 OF THE COVID-19 RESPONSE AT BICC ON 7TH JULY 2021

- The Secretary for Health – Dr. Charles Mwansambo;
- The Co-Chair Person of Presidential Task Force – Dr. Wilfred Chalamira Nkhoma;
- Members of the Presidential Task Force present here;
- All Directors and Deputy Directors from the Ministry of Health;
- Members of the Press;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon, the Presidential Task Force through the Emergency Operation Centre on COVID-19 (EOC) has been closely monitoring the trend of the pandemic in our country and we have seen an increase in the new COVID-19 confirmed cases, admissions and deaths since 1st June 2021. Based on this increase, our data indicates that we are experiencing a resurgence of the COVID-19 in our country and this indicates that we are in the third wave of the

pandemic. Our experts have worked tirelessly to come up with the alert levels and thresholds for each level so as to provide guidance on the measures to be instituted on each level. The alert levels have been categorized in 5 levels with level one having least number of cases and level 5 having an increased surge of cases, admissions and deaths. Based on that I would like to say that we are in Level 3 of the response. In this level, there are a number of rules and regulations that are supposed to be reinforced and that's why we have invited you the members of the press to communicate on the same.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as pointed out earlier that we are observing an increase in the new COVID-19 cases, from 1st June to 6th July 2021, cumulatively we have recorded 3,032 new COVID-19 cases, 62 deaths and the admissions in the treatment units have risen from 10 to 109 during the same period. This is the highest number being recorded following the reduced numbers since the end of second wave in February 2021. The increase in the number of cases and deaths is also being observed globally including the SADC countries, South Africa being most hit and Zambia following similar trends. Globally, as of 6th July 2021, there have been 183,934,913 confirmed cases of COVID-19,

including 3,985,022 deaths, reported to WHO. Cumulatively as of 6th July, Malawi has 37,366 cases including 1,218 deaths (Case Fatality Rate is at 3.26%). Of these cases, 2,465 are imported infections and 34,901 are locally transmitted. Cumulatively, 33,490 cases have now recovered (recovery rate of 89.6%) and 232 were lost to follow-up. This brings the total number of active cases to 2,426. On 5th July, there were 20 new admissions in the treatment units while nine cases were discharged. Currently, a total of 109 active cases are currently hospitalized in our treatment units across the country as of 5th July 2021.

On testing, on 5th July 2021, 1,584 COVID-19 tests were conducted. Of these, 1,129 tests were through SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Diagnostic test while the rest were through RT-PCR. The positive cases out of the total number tested (past 24 hours) translates to a positivity rate of 19.5% while a weekly positivity rate (seven days moving average) is at 15.9%. Members of the Press, Ladies and Gentlemen let me point it out that the daily and the seven days' positivity rate has increased from 1.2% and 1.8% as recorded on 1st June 2021. Cumulatively, 275,940 tests have been conducted in the country so far.

On COVID-19 vaccination, cumulatively 385,242 and 43,165 people have received the first dose and second dose respectively. The COVID-19 vaccination remain paused as we have no available doses and a total of 428,407 vaccine doses has been administered in the country so far. Let me re-assure the public that the next consignment of the vaccine is expected in a fortnight's time.

At this juncture, members of the press, ladies and gentlemen let me inform the nation on the new measures that we plan to implement in this Level 3 of the response to ensure that we suppress the further spread of the disease in our communities. The measures are as follows;

1. WORKPLACES

- a. With the objective to decongest the office, working in shifts (50% of the staff at a shift, if not working from home) is mandatory. Working from home is strongly encouraged in all offices.
- b. Employees at high-risk of severe disease such as people aged 60-year-old and above and people with comorbidities should work from home.
- c. Physical indoor meetings are discouraged, virtual meetings and outdoor meetings are encouraged.

- d. Any other gatherings within the offices are discouraged.
- e. In offices and places where food is served e.g., offices with a cafeteria, take-away food is encouraged.
- f. In offices interacting with the public, plastic/glass screens to protect the employees (physical barriers) are installed.
- g. Where possible, appointments or bookings should be encouraged, and each office shall have a contact tracing system in place.
- h. Workplaces will follow stipulated curfew times.

2. HOSPITALITY AND RECREATION BUSINESS

- a. Measures to decongest the business place are implemented such as reducing the number of people at the same time (50% of capacity), limiting the contact time inside business places, for example by increasing the number of cashiers / bank tellers / till operators to limit the time in the shop and queueing time, and increasing opening hours.
- b. Measures to ensure physical distancing such as putting marks on the floor to indicate where to stand to abide by the

recommended one-meter radius and adequately ventilated places are in place.

- c. Measures to avoid gatherings in the business place are implemented.
- d. Where possible, take away and/or delivery should be encouraged.
- e. In markets, vendors should stay at their stand or a fixed position and do not walk about to solicit the customers.
- f. At the entrance of each business place, the public is screened by at least temperature checking by trained employees and hand washing or sanitizing is mandatory for entry.
- g. A trained employee positioned at the entrance to monitor and ensure adherence from the customers.
- h. Plastic/glass screens to protect the employees (physical barriers) are installed.
- i. In supermarkets and other concerned shops, trolleys and baskets are disinfected between two clients by a trained employee.
- j. Banks to ensure ATMs always have cash and at least one hand sanitizer dispenser is available at each ATM and is always filled.

k. In bars and restaurants, outdoor sitting together with take away and/or delivery is encouraged. For indoors bars and restaurants, the capacity is reduced to 50% maximum. Indoors night clubs are closed.

l. Bars to open from 14.00 hrs to 22.00 hrs.

m. Restaurants to open 06.00hrs to 22.00hrs.

3. TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT

Travelling and transportation within Malawi

a. Travelling and transportation is further limited.

b. Travelers are advised not to travel outside their respective geographic locations unless necessary and for essential purposes,

c. Curfew imposed from 22.00hrs to 06.00hrs.

d. Conveyances shall not exceed 50% of available seats capacity.

e. Conveyances to be disinfected regularly by the operator(s).

f. Wearing of masks, face coverings, hand hygiene and sanitizing is required.

g. Respective transport regulatory authorities in collaboration with State Security Agencies to enforce preventative measures and

regulatory provisions with support from Compliance Committees

- h. Non-compliance of preventative measures by operators and passengers shall attract penalties as prescribed by Government.

Travelling internationally from Malawi

- a. No restrictions on leaving Malawi to travel internationally, however to protect public health in Malawi, travel to countries or territories, placed as high-risk destinations by Government, is not allowed
- b. Only travel for essential purposes, as defined by Government, to high risk placed destinations shall be allowed.
- c. All travelers will require a valid negative PCR test result certificate of validity as prescribed by Government.
- d. Non adherence of preventive measures by operators shall attract regulatory action

Travelling and transportation internationally to Malawi

- a. Current travel restrictions apply.
- b. All travellers to Malawi are subject to the COVID-19 restriction rules as prescribed by Government.
- c. All travelers will require a valid negative PCR test result certificate of validity as prescribed by Government.
- d. All visitors arriving from countries or territories, placed as high-risk by Government, will be subjected to fourteen (14) days institutional quarantine at their cost.
- e. Non adherence of preventive measures by operators shall attract regulatory action.

4. PUBLIC GATHERINGS

Places of worship

- a. Mandatory wearing of masks, hand washing facilities, sanitize microphone in use while preaching, church gathering service should not be more than one hour.
- b. Sitting capacity should be reduced to 50% of capacity but numbers should not exceed 100 outdoors and 50 indoors.

- c. Overnight services not allowed.
- d. Building should have open ventilation, all windows and doors to remain open during service.
- e. All places of worship should have COVID-19 compliance committees which reports to senior management of the church /mosques.

Sports Gathering

- a. Sporting activities to adhere to 100 people (players and officials).
- b. No spectators to the games allowed.

Weddings and Engagements

- a. Only restricted to 50 indoors and 100 guests outdoors.
- b. The ceremony should take less than one hour.
- c. Each Wedding and Engagements should have Covid 19 compliance sub committees which reports to the organizing committee.

Community Gatherings (Chief Platforms)

- a. Mandatory wearing of masks, availability of hand washing facilities, social distancing.
- b. Meeting only for one hour.
- c. Community gatherings should have COVID-19 compliance committees reporting to the Chief or elders of their structures.
- d. Where large groups are invited they should be divided into small groups at a time.

Funerals

- a. Mandatory wearing of masks, availability of hand washing facilities, social distancing, and the house there should be not more than 10 people depending on the size of the house and 100 outside.
- b. No vigil or overnight service prayers for all funerals not particular to COVID-19 deaths.
- c. Burial should take place within 48 hours or timelines stipulated in COVID-19 burial guidelines.

- d. Have a funeral Community COVID-19 compliance committee making sure that all the preventing measures are followed.

Markets

- a. Mandatory wearing of masks, availability of hand washing facilities, social distancing.
- b. There should be restricted movement of people from other districts.
- c. The time should be open from 06:00hrs to 18:00hrs, discouraging unnecessary trips to the markets.
- d. Have a market COVID-19 compliance committee to ensure that all the preventing measures are followed.
- e. Mobile markets to operate once a month.

Political party Rallies

- a. No political party rallies allowed.

5. EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

For day schools

- a. Disinfection, screening, contact tracing and quarantine of contacts if confirmed case at a learning institution.
- b. Closure of affected learning institution with a cluster of cases for 14 Days.
- c. The learning institution has to be disinfected.
- d. Screening for all learners/students and upon reopening of the learning institutions.
- e. Screening applies to every personnel working in the learning institutions.
- f. Referral of suspected cases to nearest health care.

In the boarding school

- a. All students that test positive have to be detained in school but will not attend classes for 14 days in order to assess the situation.
- b. Students presenting signs and symptoms but tested negative to be left in their own block .

- c. Disinfection of all school classes and hostels to be done within 24 hours.
- d. Routine screening of students by health personnel.
- e. No Visitation days for boarding learning institutions.

Members of the Press, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to emphasize the need for all of us to strictly adhere to the prescribed Level 3 measures as these will help to suppress and stop the further transmission of the disease in our country.

Thanks so much for your attention.