

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS
ON
RISING INCIDENCE OF THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) IN ZAMBIA
BY THE
THE MINISTER OF HEALTH (MRS MASEBO), MP

Madam Speaker, I thank you for according me this opportunity to update this House and the public on the increasing incidence of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Zambia. The House may wish to recall that on Wednesday 14th June, 2023, the Hon. Madam Speaker, directed that a ministerial statement be issued on the COVID-19 situation in the country. This directive followed a matter of Urgent Public Importance raised by the Hon. Andeleki, Member of Parliament for Katombola Parliamentary Constituency.

Madam Speaker, Zambia indeed has noted an increasing trend of COVID-19 cases since 16th May 2023; during which time we have recorded 1,054 cases, compared to only 195 cases recorded the preceding three weeks. This clearly shows an increasing incidence of cases. Our positivity rate over the last two weeks has averaged at 5 per cent further highlighting this increase.

Sadly, we have lost two patients to COVID-19 within the past week, after having not recorded any lives lost to COVID-19 in over two and half months to be particular in seventy-four days. Of the deceased is an eighty-three-year-old man who was admitted to Ndola Teaching Hospital and demise on 11th June, 2023, and the other one is also an eighty-three-year old female who was admitted to Kasempa District Hospital and demised yesterday.

Madam Speaker, in the last 24 hours alone, Zambia recorded 178 new cases out of 2,320 tests done representing a daily positivity of 8 per cent. The new cases were reported across thirty-one districts in the following six provinces:

<i>Province</i>	<i>Cases</i>	<i>Tested</i>
Copperbelt	69	380

Luapula	9	124
Lusaka	29	460
Muchinga	5	129
North-Western	15	892
Southern	5	310
Western	0	37

Madam Speaker, the cumulative number of cases now stands at 345,527 including 4,060 deaths. Madam Speaker, while the incidence of COVID-19 cases remains considerably low, we note a rise in daily cases detected, as well as tests positivity and continue to admit a few cases. Currently, there are 794 cases twelve of whom are admitted to hospitals in Lusaka, Copperbelt and North-Western Provinces. In the last 24 hours, we have admitted seven new cases.

Madam Speaker, the patients are admitted to University Teaching Hospital (UTH), Maina Soko Hospital and Fairview. In Lusaka, at UTH, we have two patients, in Maina Soko; we have one, in Fairview Hospital, one. Ndola Teaching Hospital has four, while Nchanga North General Hospital has two and Kalulushi District Hospital has one on the Copperbelt and Mukinge Mission hospital has one, in North-Western Province. Of the twelve currently in admission, two patients are on oxygen, one at Lusaka's Maina Soko Military Hospital and the other at Nchanga North General Hospital on the Copperbelt. Only one patient is classified as critical. Of the admitted, three are vaccinated against COVID-19 whilst nine are not vaccinated.

Madam Speaker, we have not recorded any new COVID-19 variant. The Zambia National Public Health Reference Laboratory reported that out of the fifty-seven samples that were sequenced, all the cases are of the Omicron variant with the majority of cases that is about 51 per cent being of genotype XBB; followed by XBB 1.16 at 23 per cent, then XBB 1.5 at 9 Per cent. BA2 and BA5 were of equal prevalence at 7 per cent while BA4 and BA 2.75 were in at 2 per cent each. Meanwhile, as we investigate through sentinel sites for tracking respiratory illnesses, the UTH virology laboratory has also been isolating influenza viruses. The rise in cases may be attributed to the cold weather, a season associated with increasing respiratory infections.

Madam Speaker, while the Government has not put up any restrictions, we encourage those not yet vaccinated to do so and be protected from severe COVID-19. I am happy to inform you, Madam Speaker, that over 11, 450,000 individuals have been vaccinated with at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccines while 9,282,139 are fully vaccinated.

Madam Speaker, to manage COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases including the common cold, let us wear masks, and practice cough etiquette by sneezing and coughing into your elbow or a disposable tissue if not masked. Please, dispose of the tissue in a toilet or designated and secured waste bins. Good hand hygiene practices remain a very effective way of reducing transmission to other persons. So, it is important to frequently wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitizers.

Madam Speaker, globally COVID-19 is said to no longer be a Public Health Emergency of international concern (PHEIC) however, we will continue to isolate cases over time. We recognise that the status of the pandemic has de-escalated, but that does not mean that COVID-19 is over as a global and indeed national health threat. What is of importance is that we protect ourselves through vaccination and taking up booster doses for those already vaccinated to avoid severe illness. Like we saw with the influenza H1N1 pandemic in 2009 to 2010, the pandemic came to an end in 2010 but to date, we are still isolating other viruses.

Madam Speaker, I want to state here that it is important for members of the public on their own to take the necessary measures. It is not our intention currently as the Government to put any restrictions, but we just wish to call upon members of the public, hon. Members of Parliament who are leaders, to please encourage people in our communities to take personal responsibility on this issue of COVID-19. Even here as hon. Members of Parliament, it will help us to wear masks because we are very squeezed and you do not know who has it. All I can say is that prevention is better than cure.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.
