

# **PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT TO THE NATION ON PROGRESS OF THE COVID-19 RESPONSE**

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021

Dear Countrymen and Countrywomen,

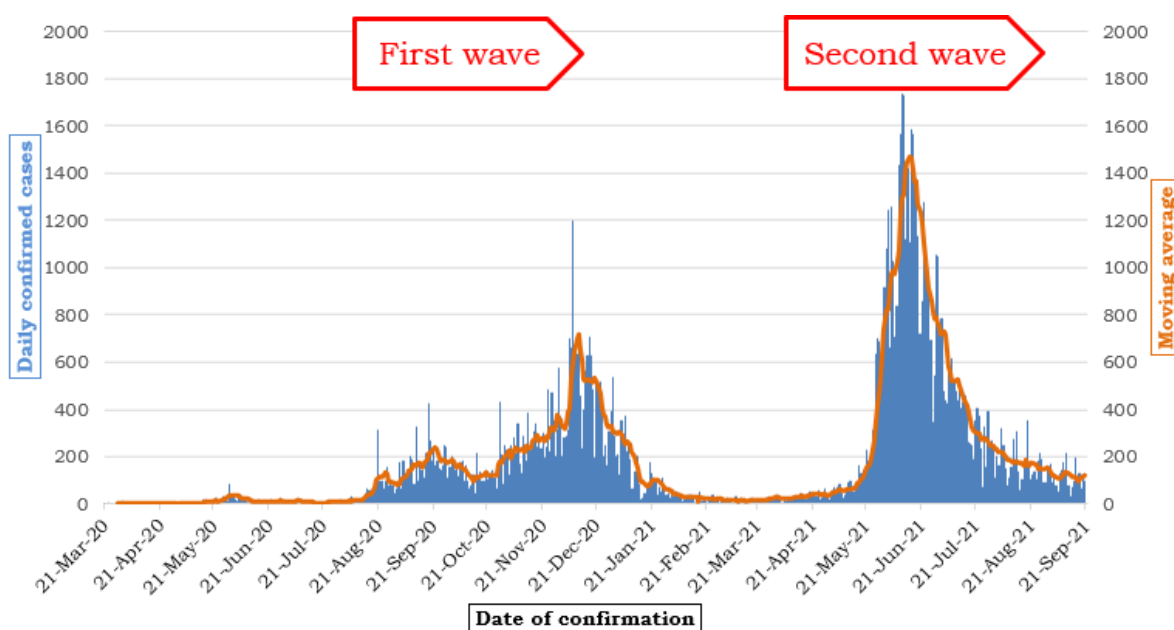
Since my last address to you on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2021, the COVID-19 transmission rates in the country have continued to decline. Despite this, some districts continue to show higher transmission rates and are considered hotspot districts. This persistent transmission is in the following 9 districts namely: Kampala, Kalungu, Kabale, Kumi, Soroti, Tororo, Gulu, Nwoya and Yumbe.

The daily average number of confirmed cases over the last one month has declined and stabilized at 124 cases countrywide, from an average of 1,445 cases at the peak of the second wave in June 2021. Similarly, the daily average number of deaths has declined to 6 from 57 deaths at the height of the peak of the second wave.

As of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021, the country has registered 122,502 confirmed cases and 3,135 deaths. Additionally,

the current admissions stand at 340 in both public and private facilities (272 in public, 66 in prisons and only 2 in the private facilities), of whom 144 (38%) are in the severe and critical category.

## **Epidemic curve showing COVID-19 cases (March 2020 – September 2021)**



Following the previous wave, the current national COVID-19 response strategy now focuses on the following interventions:

### **1. COVID-19 Vaccination**

Government continues to carry out extensive mobilization of COVID-19 vaccines and by the end of December 2021, we expect about 12 million doses as shown below:

**Table 1: Vaccine arrival forecast Sept-December 2021**

Source of Vaccine	Type of Vaccine	Quantity	Status
USA	Pfizer	1,647,000	Received - 20 September 2021
USA	Moderna	647,000	Received - 6 September 2021
France	AstraZeneca	501,000	22 September 2021
Belgium	AstraZeneca	344,900	22 September 2021
China	Sinovac	700,000	30 September,2021
USA	Pfizer	3,488,940	End of October, 2021
GoU	Johnson & Johnson	1,200,000	End of October 2021
GoU	Sinopharm	2,000,000	End of September 2021
COVAX	AstraZeneca	1,000,000	Mid October 2021
Ireland	AstraZeneca	350,000	Mid October 2021
Belgium	Johnson & Johnson	100,000	End of November 2021
<b>Total</b>		<b>11,978,840</b>	

As of now, we have 2,294,000 doses of vaccines available at the National Medical Stores (NMS) out of 11,978,840 million doses expected by end of December 2021.

In regards to the vaccination strategy, the following are being undertaken:

- i. Scaling up vaccination for all the eligible Ugandans aged 18 years and above (approx. 22 m)
- ii. Prioritizing the vaccination of the 4.8 million priority population: health workers, teachers, security personnel, elderly persons of 50 years and above, those below 50 years with comorbidities and 330,000 students in post-secondary institutions aged 18 years and above.

Therefore, I now direct with immediate effect that, all RDCs, CAOs and DHOs must carry out intensive mobilization for all eligible priority groups to go for vaccination. They should, in addition, ensure that no vaccines are wasted or left to expire. In any district where vaccines expire, the RDC, CAO and DHO will be dismissed.

## **2. Surveillance**

In order to prevent the third wave and importation or emergence of new variants in the country, I direct the Ministry of Health to:

- i. Enhance surveillance at the airport and all the 53 land ports of entry. Government will establish testing facilities at the airport and all land border points of entry. In the interim (not more than 2 weeks), the private laboratories will continue to test the incoming travellers.
- ii. The UPDF and Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will support the Ministry of Health to complete the modifications necessary for installation of the testing facilities and to carry out the surveillance processes.
- iii. Carry out regular and systematic genomic sequencing to detect any new variants (locally emerging and imported)
- iv. Work with Ministry of Education and Sports to support head teachers to carry out surveillance and

- early reporting of suspected cases in schools to the District and City Task Forces once the schools open
- v. Follow up the use of Rapid Antigen Self-tests with World Health Organization (WHO), and once approved, inform the Ministry of Education and Sports to consider their use in schools

### **3. Safe re-opening of sectors under lock down**

For safe lifting of restrictions, the National Task Force usually considers a number of factors such as; risk of transmission in that sector, vulnerability of individuals and the overall economic impact. This is further guided by the following:

- i. Scientific evidence based approach for safe and sustainable reopening in a phased manner
- ii. Enforcement of the SOPs by the sector in line with the COVID-19 Statutory Instrument
- iii. Increased awareness by the sector of the risks and adherence to SOPs

I am aware of the limitations of the current Public Health Act. Cabinet will fast track its amendment to facilitate the enforcement of SOPs and include among others, the on-spot and court fines of those who fail to adhere to SOPs.

In this regard, the National Task Force has reviewed the sectors that were pending lifting of restrictions and I now direct as follows:

*a) **Places of Worship:***

The places of worship can now open under the following conditions:

- Limit the number of worshippers at any one time to not more than 200 provided the place of worship can ensure physical distancing of 2 meters on either side and adequate aeration.
- There must be strict adherence to **all SOPs at all times** i.e. hand washing/ use of alcohol based sanitizer, temperature monitoring, and consistent wearing of face masks by all congregants **including the choir and preachers.**
- No congregation for worship after curfew hours
- The 200-persons-limit, physical distancing and all other SOPs should be respected even during special occasions e.g. weddings, funeral services, confirmation etc
- Partner with Government to communicate and mobilize the population for vaccination and other control measures

***b. Weddings, Burials and other social events:***

The number of persons attending these events can now increase to 200 under strict observance of SOPs

***c. Casinos, Gaming, Betting shops and Gyms:***

- The casinos, gaming, betting shops and gyms can now operate during the day and close by 6:00pm.
- The various local governments, Cities and Kampala Capital City Authority, working with the National Gaming and Lottery Board **MUST** inspect the various betting outlets for suitability and adherence to SoPs before opening.

***d. Concerts, disco halls, performing artists and beaches***

These tend to congregate large numbers and are difficult to control. With the level of vaccination still low, I direct that these remain closed until at least the 4.8 million priority population is vaccinated.

***e. Bars***

Bars are a high risk area where individuals have no sobriety to observe the SOPs. They will be considered for re-opening when the 4.8 million priority population is vaccinated.

*f. Cinemas and Bibanda (Local Cinema Halls)*

These should remain closed as the local cinema halls are areas of immense crowding and mostly have poor aeration and are designed to have artificial ventilation systems.

*g. Curfew*

Restriction of movement of persons at the night time is key to the enforcement of other preventive health measures. **Curfew remains at 7:00pm – 5:30am. Boda bodas should stop movement at 6:00pm.**

*h. Weekly markets*

These are open door settings and currently transmission rates are low in some areas. These can be opened with strict adherence to SOPs and the curfew hours except for current hotspot districts (Soroti, Kampala, Kalungu, Kabale, Kumi, Tororo, Gulu, Nwoya and Yumbe). The RDCs, RPCs, DPCs, DISOs, GISOs should enforce adherence to SOPs.

The Minister for Health should follow up the hotspot districts and review their situation for safe re-opening of the weekly markets after two weeks.



**i. Reopening of schools:**

Infections in children below 18 years are often mild and they recover quickly. However, many of the 15 million learners are day scholars who once infected, go back home and infect their parents and grandparents that may subsequently die. This was observed during the second wave.

To avoid a similar scenario, the National Task Force, on several occasions considered conditions for safe re-opening of schools which included; vaccination of teachers, non-teaching staff, 330,000 students aged 18 years and above, plus all the other priority population, This was in addition to the rate of transmission in the country.

To-date, out of the targeted 550,000 teachers, 269,945 have already received the 1<sup>st</sup> dose of vaccination while 96,653 have received the second dose. This leaves a total of 280,055 not yet vaccinated at all.

**Table 2: Vaccination Status of the 4.8 million priority population to-date**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> dose</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> dose</b>	<b>Unvaccinated 1st dose</b>	<b>Unvaccinated 2<sup>nd</sup> dose</b>
Teachers	550,000	269,945 (49%)	96,653 (17.6%)	280,055	453,347

50yrs+	3,348,500	309,592 (9.2%)	135,799 (4.1%)	3,038,908	3,212,701
Comorbidities	500,000	27,698 (5.5%)	10,347 (2.1%)	472,302	489,653
Health workers	150,000	112,129 (74.8%)	56,687 (37.8%)	37,871	93,313
Security	250,000	145,389 (58.2%)	48,493 (19.4%)	104,611	201,507
<b>Total</b>				<b>3,933,747</b>	<b>4,450,521</b>

I, now, direct as follows:

- a. Post-Secondary institutions of learning to open with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021 on condition that; all teachers and non-teaching staff are vaccinated
- b. The 330,000 students aged 18 years and above in post-secondary institutions should be vaccinated as soon as possible
- c. The rest of the learning institutions will open in January 2022.

I call upon all teachers and support staff to get vaccinated as soon as possible to enable safe re-opening of schools.

#### **4. Patient Care**

Regarding patient care and the challenges observed in the second wave which were:

- High patient numbers
- Inadequate oxygen supply
- Insufficient bed capacity
- High cost of care and holding of dead bodies by the private health facilities

I direct the Ministry of Health as follows;

- Fast track the installation of Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants at National (1) and Regional Referral Hospitals (15) and the cryogenic plants at 3 designated regions
- Prepare selected district hospitals in hard-to-reach areas and islands as treatment centres to cater for patients that have challenges accessing Regional Referral Hospitals
- Strengthen Home Based Care (HBC) through refresher training of VHTs and equip them with the HBC Tool kits
- Work with the Ministry of Education and Sports to ensure that schools designate their sick bays with basic Infection, Prevention and Control materials for isolation of mildly sick children once schools open.

## **5. Strengthening decentralized response**

The implementation of the preventive health measures is majorly carried out by the Local

Governments. I therefore direct the Ministry of Local Government to ensure continuous functionality of the District and Sub-County Task Forces.

The Ugandan health workers have done a commendable job since the start of the pandemic. I would like to commend them for the spirit of hard work and patriotism.

I thank you for listening.

For God and my Country

Yoweri Kaguta Museveni

22 September 2021