



ZAMBIA'S THIRD WAVE OF COVID-19: A CALL TO DISCIPLINE AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday 7th June, 2021

On the 2nd of June 2021, Ministry of Health Permanent Secretary - Technical Services Dr. Kennedy Malama announced **that Zambia had entered the Third Wave of the COVID-19 pandemic owing to the sharp rise in new COVID-19 cases and an increase in admissions to hospital facilities with the fear that more patients could portray severe symptoms** of the disease if citizens do not actively implement the prescribed COVID-19 prevention measures.

A sudden increase in COVID-19 cases has been recorded country wide in the past week. This comes shortly after the country saw a reduction in the number of infections and hospitalizations marking the end of the Second Wave. **On 2nd June 2021, statistics indicated a sharp increase in cases and the country recorded 742 new cases out of 9,857 tests** conducted representing a steep rise in the positivity rate of 8% and marking the beginning of the Third wave. The current cumulative number of confirmed **cases now stands at 100,278** with the total number of **deaths standing at 1,308 people and a positivity rate of 11% as at 6th June 2021.**

This is an earnest reminder that the COVID-19 virus is still a big threat to Zambia and the world at large. **Medical professionals have continued to raise awareness on the negative impacts that complacency and reluctance to conform to the public health guidelines and the five golden rules;** wearing of face masks, regular sanitizing of hands, social distancing in public, avoiding crowded places and seeking medical attention immediately if symptomatic.

Furthermore, with the coming onboard of the AstraZeneca vaccine, **it is imperative that every eligible citizen seeks vaccination as soon as possible. The turnout while the vaccine was being administered was below expectation.** This could be partly attributed to misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccines especially on social media platforms like Facebook. Therefore, it is important that the myths surrounding the vaccines and COVID-19 in general be countered with facts through awareness campaigns to encourage as many people as possible to take the vaccine. Every individual citizen has a role to play in overcoming the pandemic.

As the world is under threat of this Third Wave of COVID-19, individual discipline and collective responsibility in adhering to the public health guidelines will be crucial in averting further spread of the virus. This indeed is a concern for Zambia as we transition into the colder months of winter and a general election campaign period. **Critical concerns are that election campaigns will increase the risk of exposure as they are characterised by mass gatherings, hence a call by the Electoral Commission of Zambia to avoid campaign rallies which are super-spreader events.** Similarly, the Government has called for heightened levels of preparedness at sub-national level in order to effectively respond to the looming threat.

Lessons can be drawn from other countries that have conducted elections amid the pandemic such as the United States, Malaysia and Poland. It should be noted that various prevention measures that these countries put in place to protect rally attendees from contracting the virus such as masking up and social distancing were poorly enforced and were characterized by a lack of adherence. However, on the other hand, countries like Singapore and Kuwait have provided an alternative blueprint for how campaigns can be conducted amid the pandemic through their extensive use of social media platforms like Zoom, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp to get their messages across to the electorate. Zambia should opt to adopt alternative campaign platforms in view of the Third Wave as we head towards the August 12 polls.

At the onset of the Second Wave in January 2021, **PMRC made a call to action for all citizens to actively participate in complementing Government interventions to mitigate the spread of the virus.** Therefore, PMRC commends Government for its continued efforts in strengthening the **multi-sectoral approach** in order to improve the response measures and case management, especially at community level where the risks are much higher due to the laxity in adherence to public health guidelines.

Further, PMRC reiterate its call to action for **greater responsibility** at individual level to **protect families, institutions and communities.**

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