

PRESS BRIEFING BY HON MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR. OSAGIE EHANIRE AT PRESS BRIEFING BY PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON COVID-19. MONDAY 3rd NOV, 2020

Protocol

A total of 63,036 confirmed cases have been recorded as at today, 3rd November, 2020, out of 627,600 persons tested so far for Covid-19, with 59,328 cases treated and discharged. We have sadly lost 1,147 persons to the disease in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. We currently have 2,561 active cases which are being managed at home or in treatment centres.

2. We are concerned about the decline in the testing rate in several States of the Federation. Records show that only Lagos and the FCT have met the testing target of at least 1% of the population. Plateau, Rivers and Gombe have reached over 50% of target, while 25 states are yet to reach 25% of their population. We do not have the confidence to draw firm conclusions on our status, till this situation improves.

3. Our concern is heightened by several emerging factors that challenge whatever gains we may have made in recent months:

- a. the inevitable need to reopen air travel, to stimulate economic activities,

- b. the imminent Reopening of schools and Youth Service, again necessary for restoration of social order, but which global experience links with spikes in covid infection rates in most countries
- c. the effect of recent social agitation and unrest, with attendant disruption of services and widespread breach of all infection prevention protocols,
- d. the growing lackadaisical attitude to covid19 and disregard for safety and simple infection prevention and control measures, which I must admit, is not peculiar to our country.

4. Preliminary reports show that contact tracing and case finding have declined in states with a consequent reduction in the number of persons tested. I therefore renew my call on states and stakeholders to step up testing capacity, to help identify positive cases for Isolation or treatment and protect the rest of the population, which is the duty of government. I wish to particularly emphasize the need to protect the elderly and vulnerable, who are the most affected in fatalities. In this connection, the Ministry of Health will next week launch an advocacy campaign in which a representative of the Hon. Minister of Health will visit hotspot States that require encouragement, to discuss their specific needs and challenges and find ways of stepping up sample collection for testing. I have

also directed the Department of Hospital Services to work with NCDC to design criteria and a strategy for sentinel surveillance with sample collection at Out-Patient Units Federal Health Institutions and their outreaches, to augment the work of State authorities. This should improve the test volume considerably.

5. The evolving global situation of covid19 gives us much reason for concern. Over 2.8 million cases were reported last one week, with half of the cases in Europe. The UK, France, Germany, Spain and others in Europe have resorted to lockdown and other measures, to control the pandemic. With the high volume of air traffic between Nigeria and Europe, we are examining the associated risk factors for Nigeria. The PTF has set up stringent criteria and measures so far, to limit COVID-19 importation: nevertheless, 18 travellers out of over 78,000 arrivals were found to be covid positive at the second testing in Nigeria. This is a relatively small number, but it could increase with rising volume of flights. Moreover, NCDC estimated traveller compliance with 2nd testing after arrival to be about 60%, which is a challenge we are responding to in innovative ways, as we work constantly to improve the arrival processes for better protection of citizens. To improve function at international air and sea Points of Entry, the Division of Port Health Services has been directed to work with NCDC, Ministry of Health Planning Department and relevant Agencies of the Ministries of Aviation

and Interior and Transportation, to bring up a new design of structures and protocols that will enhance its ability to function more efficiently and effectively and ensure reduction in the risk of importing Infectious disease, especially covid19, by promptly identifying, isolating and processing suspected cases before they enter the country.

6. While we still evaluate the impact of recent unguarded mass gatherings in various parts of the country as a risk factor for spreading COVID-19, my concern is that we may find a spike in confirmed cases, with the widespread disregard for preventive measures at the large gatherings and movements. We must take collective responsibility for each other's actions, if we are not to experience the upsurges in new cases experienced in many other countries, and a throwback to conditions worse than the present. An appraisal of Nigeria's position in the global covid19 space has been prepared by the Ministerial Expert Advisory Committee on COVID-19 and will be discussed at PTF, before release to the public.

7. All citizens are enjoined to do their bit by adhering to non-pharmaceutical preventive measures, like appropriate wearing of face masks, physical distancing and good hand and respiratory hygiene and avoidance of non-essential travel and visits. Technology makes possible for us to connect virtually with friends and family. In this regard, citizens are again also strongly advised to postpone all travel

to high burden countries of the world, including Europe and the Americas, except absolutely necessary. The better we are able to control importation of fresh covid-19 cases to our country, the easier we can control in-country spread and return to our normal life.

8. We have continued to work with WHO to assure Nigeria's access to the vaccine as soon as it becomes available. The Ministry of Health is preparing to sign a Memorandum of understanding with a first line Pharmaceutical company in Nigeria, on a Public/Private partnership to set up a modern vaccine production Company in our country and work towards licensed indigenous production.

Thank you.