

COVID-19 and HIV: Weekly Digest

15 May 2020

The Children and AIDS Learning Collaborative's COVID-19 and HIV digest compiles recent knowledge and updates related to the COVID-19 pandemic of interest to those working on HIV among children, adolescents, and pregnant women. The selections below represent views of the authors and do not reflect UNICEF positions.

COVID-19 AND IMPACT ON HIV

The Cost of Inaction: COVID-19-related service disruptions could cause hundreds of thousands of extra deaths from HIV

11 May 2020, WHO and UNAIDS

A modelling group convened by WHO and UNAIDS estimates that pandemic-related disruptions to HIV services for six months could cause more than 500,000 additional deaths from AIDS-related illnesses in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020–2021. Gains made in preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission could also be reversed. See also: [UN News](#) and [Devex](#) (video)

AIDS, TB and Malaria Set to Get Deadlier Due to Coronavirus

11 May 2020, *Forbes*

In addition to the HIV-focused modelling, this report discusses TB and malaria projections that are set to increase globally due to the pandemic. Experts urge essential services for HIV, TB and malaria be continued instead of waiting for lockdowns to end. See also: [Frontline AIDS](#) (statement)

ADAPTING HIV SERVICE DELIVERY

Multi-Month Supplies of HIV Medications – Recommended during Lockdowns – Are Not Authorised in Many Countries

12 May 2020, *aidsmap*

According to [an analysis](#) that reviewed national HIV policies in 126 countries, a third of them do not permit prescriptions of three months or longer. High-income countries in particular have been slower to implement multi-month prescribing, which has been recommended during the pandemic to limit visits to health care facilities.

Eswatini: Tackling COVID-19 amid HIV and TB epidemics

8 May 2020, Médecins Sans Frontières

MSF highlights the challenges of responding to COVID-19 in settings with high rates of HIV and TB and the experience of adapting care in Eswatini.

UNAIDS Ensures Continuity of HIV Treatment for People Living with HIV in Botswana

11 May 2020, UNAIDS

In Botswana, UNAIDS worked with private sector and government partners to ensure availability of ARVs to support the continuity of HIV treatment during the pandemic.

Protecting Mothers and Babies from HIV during the COVID-19 Pandemic

12 May 2020, Global Fund

Current lockdowns and travel restrictions are barriers to accessing health services for mothers and pregnant women living with HIV. Global Fund highlights partner work to deliver HIV treatment in Uganda.

The Health Workers Braving COVID-19 Lockdown to Deliver Medicines to HIV-positive Moms

12 May 2020, *The New Indian Express*

In India during the lockdown, health workers from Plan India are working with the National AIDS Control Organisation to deliver ARVs as well to mothers living with HIV.

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS AND CHILDREN

More questions remain on how the SARS-CoV-2 virus behaves in children compared to adults. There is emerging evidence and more analysis of previously reported data on viral transmission and on the multisystem inflammatory disease similar to the Kawasaki syndrome seen in some children across the world. See:

- [Kawasaki-like Disease: Emerging complication during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (*The Lancet*, Comment, 13 May)
- [Rethinking COVID-19 in Children](#) (*New York Times*, 12 May)

An observational study in Italy evaluated features of children presenting with Kawasaki-like disease in the last five years, divided into groups by before and after the beginning of the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic. Children diagnosed after the epidemic began showed evidence of immune response to the virus, were older and had more severe symptoms. Incidence of the Kawasaki-like disease increased by 30-fold. ([The Lancet](#), 13 May)

A correspondence on the initial case cluster from the UK that triggered global attention presented characteristics, clinical presentations, treatment provided and outcomes for the eight children. The authors noted that multispecialty input was needed due to the multiorgan involvement and its severity. ([The Lancet](#), 7 May)

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) summarized the characteristics of the paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome cases seen thus far and recommended including the syndrome as a possible complication to be reported for EU-level COVID-19 surveillance. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also released a health advisory with a case definition and recommendations for health providers. See:

- [Rapid Risk Assessment](#) (ECDC, 15 May)
- [Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children \(MIS-C\) Associated with COVID-19](#) (CDC, 14 May)

There is more evidence of other impacts of the pandemic, including related disruptions to health services, education and food security, on children. In the US, there has been a substantial decrease in the administration of childhood vaccines; experts warn of increased risk of vaccine preventable disease and outbreaks. ([Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#), 8 May) UNICEF noted that the pandemic is “quickly becoming a child rights crisis” that could lead to a further 6,000 children under-five dying of preventable causes each day and [appealed for \\$1.6 billion](#) to support its humanitarian response. The International Paediatric Association released a [statement](#) on protecting child health.

Lastly, as countries consider reopening schools, questions remain on how children transmit the virus and if they are less infectious than adults ([Nature](#), 7 May). The WHO released ‘[Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19](#)’ to support decision makers and educators with a review of evidence.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

[Uniting Behind a People’s Vaccine Against COVID-19](#)

14 May 2020, UNAIDS

Ahead of the World Health Assembly, global leaders called for a guarantee that when a safe and effective vaccine for the novel coronavirus is developed, it is produced rapidly at scale and made available to all people in all countries for free.

See also: [AVAC and TAG Statement on Ethical Conduct of SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine Challenge Studies](#)

[Researchers in Senegal are Developing a Coronavirus Test Kit to Be Used Across Africa](#)

11 May 2020, *The World*

The Pasteur Institute in Dakar and British biotech Mologic are developing a COVID-19 rapid detection test kit that could be available by early June and meet the needs of remote populations.

See also: [African Scientists Sense a Once-In-A-Life Opportunity to Push For Research Funding](#) (*Quartz*)

[Remdesivir Is ‘The Best That We Have Right Now’ for COVID-19](#)

May 11, 2020, *Healio*

The Infectious Disease Society of America and the HIV Medicine Association called for transparency on the distribution of remdesivir, in light of its recent approval for emergency use. Earlier, pediatric infectious disease physicians [had suggested](#) remdesivir be used as the preferred antiviral for children with severe illness.

GLOBAL IMPACT OF COVID-19

[Health Workers Become Unexpected Targets during COVID-19](#)

11 May 2020, *The Economist*

In addition to the challenges of treating a new infection, health workers around the world are facing more violence, especially due to fear and misinformation about the pandemic, as well as more psychological distress.

[Over 300 Lawmakers Worldwide Urge IMF, World Bank to Cancel Poor Countries’ Debt](#)

13 May 2020, *Reuters*

In a letter to the World Bank and the IMF, more than 300 parliamentarians from around the world urged debt cancellation for low-income countries amid concern that the pandemic will devastate developing countries and emerging economies.

[Brazil’s Pandemic Is Just Beginning](#)

10 May 2020, *The Atlantic*

Brazil is set to be hit hard by the pandemic and faces compounded challenges of high inequality. Socioeconomic disparities in the country are affecting viral transmission as well as the broader impact of the pandemic.

See also: [COVID-19 in Brazil: “So what?”](#) (*The Lancet Editorial*)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

[Amid COVID-19, Communities Continue Fight against Other Pandemics](#)

11 May 2020, *Reuters*

The Global Fund’s Linda Mafu notes how the work communities are doing for COVID-19 overlaps with efforts for HIV, TB and malaria.

[A Wake-Up Call: COVID-19 and its impact on children’s health and wellbeing](#)

12 May 2020, *Lancet Global Health*

UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore presents six areas of focus to protect the health and well-being of children and mothers in the context of COVID-19.

[Opinion: How to prevent the 2020s from becoming a lost decade for children](#)

11 May 2020, *Devex*

Chief Executive of Save the Children UK, Kevin Watkins discusses critical steps to protect children from COVID-19 and its downstream impacts on poverty, health and well-being.

[Women Are on the COVID-19 Frontline – We must give them the support they need](#)

11 May 2020, *The Guardian*

UN’s Humanitarian Chief Mark Lowcock and UNFPA Executive Director Natalia Kanem discuss the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women.

[The Problem with Predicting Coronavirus Apocalypse in Africa](#)

7 May 2020, *Al Jazeera*

The authors argue that predicting harsh COVID-19 outcomes in Africa ignores the region’s experience with infectious diseases and “epidemiological know-how”.

[COVID-19 Testing: Lessons from the HIV testing experience](#)

13 May 2020, *Health Affairs*

The authors note lessons from the HIV program experience that are relevant to SARS-CoV-2 and provide recommendations to promote widespread testing.

[Access to Lifesaving Medical Resources for African Countries: COVID-19 testing and response](#)

7 May 2020, *The Lancet*

Global health experts warn against slow and inadequate access to new COVID-19 diagnostics and treatments in sub-Saharan Africa.

[COVID-19 Shines Spotlight on Race and Gender Inequities in Healthcare](#)

12 May 2020, *New Security Beat*

As an event at the Wilson Center on the impact of COVID-19 on inequity, speakers highlighted barriers faced by women and girls.

AROUND THE UNITED NATIONS

- UNAIDS [featured the coordinated work](#) of United Nations entities in South Africa to support government and community responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- WHO’s [2020 World Health Statistics](#) that showed low-income countries reported biggest gains in life expectancy; one critical driver was improved access to services to prevent and treat HIV, malaria and TB.

- United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects [released](#) its mid-2020 report projecting that the global economy will lose nearly \$8.5 trillion in output over the next two years due to COVID-19.
- United Nations on Monday [held a policy discussion](#) on a range of multilateral solutions for COVID-19 response as well as getting back on track toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- United Nations partners are [working to address](#) stigma, discrimination and xenophobia during the pandemic.
- UNODC, WHO, UNAIDS and OHCHR released a [statement on prisons](#) and the vulnerability to COVID-19.

RECENT RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

[Early Estimates of the Indirect Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Maternal and Child Mortality in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A modelling study](#)

12 May 2020, *The Lancet Global Health*

The researchers modelled three scenarios to estimate maternal and under-5 child deaths resulting from COVID-19's disruption of health systems and decreased access to food. The least severe scenario over six months showed 253,500 additional child deaths and 12,200 additional maternal deaths and the most severe showed 1,157,000 child and 56,700 maternal additional deaths.

[Triple Combination of Interferon Beta-1b, Lopinavir-Ritonavir, and Ribavirin in the Treatment of Patients Admitted to Hospital with COVID-19: An open-label, randomised, phase 2 trial](#)

8 May 2020, *The Lancet*

A phase 2 randomised trial assessed a combination therapy with lopinavir-ritonavir, ribavirin and interferon beta-1b among hospitalized COVID-19 patients in Hong Kong. Results showed significantly shorter median time to a negative SARS-CoV-2 test with the triple combination versus the control. *See also:* [Commentary](#)

[Characteristics and Outcomes of Children with Coronavirus Disease 2019 Infection Admitted to US and Canadian Pediatric Intensive Care Units](#)

11 May 2020, *JAMA Pediatrics*

This cross-sectional study in the US and Canada describes characteristics of children with severe COVID-19. In general, children admitted to intensive care units in this group had comorbidities. In the group of 48 children, 40 (83%) had preexisting medical conditions, 35 (73%) presented with respiratory symptoms, 18 (38%) required invasive ventilation. *See also:* [New York Times](#), [Medscape](#)

[HIV and Food Insecurity: A syndemic amid the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

8 May 2020, *AIDS and Behavior*

The health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19 may interfere with the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Food insecurity is already an issue for people living with HIV and the pandemic may exacerbate concerns.

New resources for global, regional and country level practitioners working on HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic are presented below. To find additional documents and join the discussion, visit: www.childrenandaids.org/covid19

RESOURCES

[Community-based health care, including outreach and campaigns, in the context of COVID-19](#)

May 2020

This guidance by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, WHO and UNICEF outlines the role of community-based care to maintain essential services and respond to COVID-19.

[Framework for Healthcare Systems Providing Non-COVID-19 Clinical Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

12 May 2020

The CDC released a framework for the delivery of non-COVID clinical care during the COVID-19 pandemic, balancing need for health services with minimizing risks to patients and healthcare workers.

[Global HIV Prevention Working Group: Briefs on HIV prevention during COVID-19](#)

April 2020

The Global HIV Prevention Coalition released briefs on HIV prevention during COVID-19, addressing: (a) [supply and demand generation for condoms](#), (b) [maintaining prevention services](#), and (c) [lessons from HIV prevention for COVID-19 prevention](#).

[Responding to COVID-19 in Africa: Using data to find a balance](#)

5 May 2020

The Partnership for Evidence-Based Response to COVID-19 (PERC) presents findings from a survey conducted in 20 African countries and provides guidance to governments and decision-makers on using data to make informed decisions.

[Balancing the COVID-19 Response with Wider Health Needs: Key decision-making considerations for low- and middle-income countries](#)

8 May 2020

Center for Global Development (CGD) presents trade-offs and recommendations for decision makers balancing a spectrum of health needs during the pandemic.

[Country Updates on Policy and Practice Adaptations from Zambia and Sierra Leone](#)

WEBINAR 12 May 2020

ICAP at Columbia University and DSD hosted a discussion of program adaptations in Zambia and Sierra Leone in the context of COVID-19 with government officials and program managers.

[Protecting the Vulnerable: COVID-19 Update No. 25](#)

8 May 2020

This update from WHO's EPI-WIN focuses on vulnerable populations, including those with conditions that require sustained treatment.

[Sierra Leone: COVID-19 guidance on comprehensive HIV service delivery](#)

May 2020

Sierra Leone's National HIV/AIDS Control Programme released guidelines on continuing to provide HIV services during the pandemic.

[Promoting Health Equity, Gender and Ethnic Equality, and Human Rights in COVID-19 Responses: Key considerations](#)

UPDATED 5 May 2020

PAHO presents considerations and resources to develop equitable national COVID-19 efforts.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **19 May 2020:** The ICAP and DSD series on differentiated service delivery and COVID-19 will continue with interventions to support uninterrupted treatment during lockdown. *8am ET / 2pm SAST* >> [More](#)

To submit feedback or content for inclusion in our weekly digests, please email Rikke Le Kirkegaard at rlekirkegaard@unicef.org.