

COVID-19 and HIV: AIDS 2020 Special Digest

23 July 2020

This special issue of the Children and AIDS Learning Collaborative's COVID-19 and HIV digest presents updates from recent conferences related to COVID-19 and HIV among children, adolescents, and pregnant women.

Hosted by the International AIDS Society, the **Virtual COVID-19 Conference** took place on 10 July as part of the *23rd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2020: Virtual)*.

All session recordings are available on the [International AIDS Society's YouTube](#). Presentations and abstracts are also available on covid19.aids2020.org.

Presented below are selected abstracts on COVID-19 among children, adolescents and pregnant women.



AN IAS VIRTUAL CONFERENCE | 10 - 11 JULY

Discussions on COVID-19 and HIV

Special Session: [Making sense of the science](#)

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Anthony Fauci, Director of Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA) Salim Abdool Karim and US Global AIDS Coordinator Deborah Birx discussed scientific developments since SARS-CoV-2 emerged with a reflection on other infectious diseases. Ambassador Birx noted that like for HIV, there are specific vulnerable groups by race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status for COVID-19; as a lesson from the HIV response, tailored messaging and a targeted approach should be used to increase access to testing and care. Professor Karim noted South Africa's investment in setting up community groups for COVID-19 to lead a community-based response, a learning from the country's experience with HIV.

Video: [Preparing for tomorrow](#)

Co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Bill Gates noted that investments currently made in COVID-19 vaccine development, diagnostic tools and libraries of antiviral drugs will also be useful for HIV. The global community displayed a model of collaborating and building a distribution system for HIV drugs and innovations, including through the Global Fund; this is the model of collaboration that COVID-19 tools should follow to ensure equitable distribution.

Session 3: [Country policies and practices: Different pathways and similar intentions](#)

In the plenary speech for this session, Director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Peter Piot discussed lessons learned from the fight against other infectious diseases like HIV for COVID-19. HIV has shown us that behaviour change is possible but difficult to sustain; political leadership and an enabling environment is key to creating this change. Another lesson is the need for combination prevention; even with a COVID-19 vaccine, certain control measures should be continued. A good response requires good national and global leadership. In addition, context and local action should be prioritized; this includes gathering more ground-level data for decision-making and building trust at the community level. Human rights should not be ignored in policies. Lastly, we need to be thinking about epidemic preparedness and ensuring space for activism, which in turn will facilitate a long-term response.

Oral abstract sessions on HIV, children, adolescents, and pregnant women

[In-Utero Mother-to-Child SARS-Cov-2 Transmission - Viral Detection and Fetal Immune Response](#)

Claudio Fenizia, University of Milan

The researchers analyzed antibody and inflammatory responses in the placenta and plasma of 31 pregnant women who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 and their babies. Two newborns tested positive for the virus and in both cases, placenta specimens were also positive. According to the presentation, this preliminary study suggests that vertical transmission of SARS-CoV-2 is possible.

[Declining Trends in Maternal and Child Health Service Use Show that COVID-19 May Be Affecting Essential Health Services in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala](#)

Cara Endyke-Doran, Management Sciences for Health

The study examined COVID-19's impact on key maternal and child health service use in Quetzaltenango,

[Evidence of a Significant Secretary-Iga-Dominant SARS-Cov-2 Immune Response in Human Milk Following Recovery from COVID-19](#)

Rebecca Powell, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

The study explored the potential for antibodies in breast milk to be purified and used as a therapeutic. Samples from 15 women with previous SARS-CoV-2 infections showed a strong antibody immune response in breast milk after infection. The study author noted that the results point toward conducting further analysis with a larger sample on potential therapeutic characteristics.

[Policy and Practice Of ARV Multi-Month Dispensing in PEPFAR Supported Countries](#)

Meaghan O'Keefe Douglas, USAID

While PEPFAR has been recommending 3-month and 6-month multi-month dispensing of ART since before the pandemic, rollout has been varied. In the context of

Guatemala. There was a 21 per cent drop and a 29 per cent drop in at least one ANC visit in March and April 2020 compared to the months in 2019. Vaccine coverage was 7 per cent lower in 2020 than in the 2019 period. While there are limitations due to COVID-19 restrictions also affecting data collection, the declining trends suggest that the pandemic impacts maternal and child health.

COVID-19, PEPFAR is promoting the acceleration of multi-month dispensing practices to mitigate ART interruptions. In this review, all 37 countries allow multi-month dispensing but some have barriers or restrictions for 6-month dispensing. The presentation recommended policy changes to improve rollout and support for dispensing ART outside of clinical visits, especially for children.

ePosters on HIV, children, adolescents and pregnant women

Compassionate Use of Remdesivir in Children with Severe COVID-19

Kathleen Chiotos, The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

The study included 77 children with severe COVID-19 who received remdesivir for a maximum of 10 days. The efficacy and safety of remdesivir is not known in children though it has shown promise in adults. Of children in this study, 50 per cent received mechanical ventilation. While there was no control group, the authors reported clinical recovery in 80 per cent of children on ventilators and in 87 per cent of those without invasive oxygen support.

#StaySafe: New possibilities and psychological support for teenagers and youth in the COVID-19 pandemic

Yana Panfilova, Teenergizer

Peer support movement Teenergizer presented lessons learned from its #StaySafe campaign, which covered five countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The campaign, which included trainings and messaging on mental health, sexual health and HIV/AIDS, found that young people often need more support than adults to cope with isolation and social distancing. Young people need access to professional and peer support.

Compassionate Use of Remdesivir in Pregnant Women with Severe COVID-19

Richard Burwick, Cedars Sinai

In this study of pregnant or postpartum women, 86 women with severe COVID-19 received a 10-day course of remdesivir. Eighteen of 19 postpartum women and 27 out of the 67 pregnant women needed ventilators. All patients recovered and were extubated. There was no control group for comparison.

Evidence and Recommendations for Women with COVID-19 who Desire to Breastfeed: A narrative review of the literature

Naiá Ortelan, Instituto Gonçalo Moniz, Fundação Os

This review of literature on SARS-CoV-2 and breastfeeding notes areas for policymakers and providers to support breastfeeding during the pandemic. Current evidence suggest that the benefits of breastfeeding outweigh any risk of transmission.

Social, Domestic Violence and Mental Health Impacts of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Pregnant Women in Cape Town, South Africa

Zulfa Abrahams, University of Cape Town

The study explored food insecurity, violence and mental health disorders experienced by pregnant women during South Africa's lockdown period. Perinatal women interviewed in this study experienced increased levels of distress.



The **23rd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2020: Virtual)** took place online on 6–10 July 2020.

A summary of the latest research and updates on children, adolescents and pregnant women shared at the conference can be found in the Children and AIDS Learning Collaborative's upcoming newsletter on *AIDS 2020: Virtual*.

Presented below are selections from the conference on the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact on people living with and at risk for HIV.

Discussions on COVID-19 and HIV

Plenary: [Fighting HIV in the Shadow of COVID-19](#)

The Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Peter Sands noted that "COVID-19 is derailing the fight against HIV in multiple ways". He highlighted how COVID-19 has disrupted HIV prevention, testing and treatment programmes as well as how health partners and communities are developing new solutions to unite to fight against HIV.

Satellite Sessions

Some session content will be made available on the [AIDS 2020 website](#) on 27 July. Sessions on COVID-19 include:

- Differentiated service delivery in 2020 – Responding to the needs of people living with HIV before, during and after COVID-19 (IAS)
- COVID-19 mitigation approaches for HIV, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (WHO)
- Optimized diagnostic networks key to responding the COVID 19 – Doing more with less (ASLM, CHAI, UNICEF, Unitaid)
- HIV, COVID-19 and Global Health at an Inflection Point: Going Forward in Partnership (Global Fund)

New Global Publications

As shared in the COVID-19 and HIV: Weekly Digest 12 (10 July), the International AIDS Society released a new report ([COVID-19 and HIV: A Tale of Two Pandemics](#)) highlighting how COVID-19 could derail progress made in HIV and providing recommendations for policies and programmes; UNAIDS specifically spotlighted how the pandemic could affect HIV treatment in low- and middle-income countries in its 2020 HIV estimates progress report ([Seizing the Moment: Tackling entrenched inequalities to end epidemics](#)); the WHO released results from its [new survey](#) that warned of significant disruptions to HIV treatment availability due to COVID-19; UNICEF shared [recommendations](#) for preventing widening inequalities related to COVID-19 and children living with HIV.

Video Interviews

In an [Opening Series conversation](#) (7 July), the Founder and Chairman of the Elton John AIDS Foundation Sir Elton John and David Furnish discussed stigma and marginalized communities, and the context of COVID-19.

In an [AIDS2020: Virtual DAILY episode](#) (6 July), NIAID's Anthony Fauci discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV research and care. Also in [AIDS 2020: Virtual DAILY](#) (9 July), MTV Shuga's leadership and cast discussed behavioural change campaigns, public health messaging during COVID-19 and the impact of lockdowns.

In [aidsmapLIVE – AIDS 2020 special](#) (9 July), HIV experts discussed whether people living with HIV are at greater risk from COVID-19 as well as the impact of the pandemic on HIV services.

Presentations and Posters on COVID-19 and HIV

Clinical Outcomes by HIV Serostatus, CD4 Count, and Viral Suppression among People Hospitalized with COVID-19 in the Bronx, New York

Abstract OABLB0102

Patel et al. presented a study comparing 100 COVID-19 patients living with HIV and 4513 patients without HIV in New York City. It found no differences in length of hospital stay or mortality. CD4 count was not associated with length of stay or mortality but was associated with risks of intubation. Overall, people living with HIV had a higher risk of intubation; however, no one with a detectable viral load got intubated or died at the hospital.

See: [‘Same COVID Mortality With/Without HIV at NY Center--More Intubations With HIV’](#) (NATAP)

Rapid Adaptation of HIV Differentiated Service Delivery Program Design in Response to COVID-19: Results from 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract LBPEE44

The HIV Coverage, Quality, and Impact Network (CQUIN) outlined the experience of 14 African countries on differentiated service delivery (DSD) for HIV. In response to the pandemic, all countries made substantive changes to their DSD programmes. Ten countries expanded eligibility for multi-month dispensing.

See: [‘COVID-19 pandemic has speeded up the implementation of multi-month dispensing’](#) (aidsmap)

Immunologic Characteristics of Acute COVID-19 in People with HIV

Abstract OABLB0104

Another study from New York City from Ho H et al. examined characteristics of 93 people living with HIV hospitalized for COVID-19. People living with HIV had higher levels of inflammation. Those with HIV who died of COVID-19 had lower total lymphocyte levels compared to those with better outcomes but there were no differences in mortality by CD4 counts, age, sex or body mass index as well as by whether or not they had an undetectable viral load.

See: [‘New York studies look at COVID-19 outcomes and immune function among people with HIV’](#) (aidsmap)

COVID-19 Pandemic Increases Socioeconomic Vulnerability of LGBTI+ Communities and Their Susceptibility to HIV

Abstract LBPEE53

This analysis from a survey in 138 countries described COVID-19's economic impact as well as impact on HIV treatment and prevention for the LGBTI+ community. Among the respondents, 12 per cent reported HIV and 16 per cent did not know their HIV status. More than 20 per cent of those on ART said their access to treatment had been limited due to COVID-19.

See: [‘Survey shows the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on LGBT communities’](#) (aidsmap)

AIDS 2020: Partner Publications

Prioritizing Children in the COVID-19 Response

13 July 2020, POZ

Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF)'s Charles "Chip" Lyons discusses a key takeaway from *AIDS 2020*: mistakes from the HIV response should not be repeated. Children and young people must be prioritized in the COVID-19 response.

Five Key Takeaways for Human Rights in the Time of COVID-19

17 July 2020, Frontline AIDS

Following the discussions at *AIDS 2020*, Frontline AIDS outlines key points about human rights impacts of COVID-19, roles of communities and how the pandemic affects progress on HIV prevention, particularly among marginalized communities.

Evidence-based Approaches for Reaching HIV Epidemic Control among Children and Adolescents

7 July 2020, Pact

Pact discusses an *AIDS 2020* session on reaching epidemic control among children and adolescents with HIV as well as interventions for paediatric case finding, ART initiation and retention, and viral load suppression.



The **HIV2020 Conference** began on 6 July. It will continue as a series of 2-hour sessions weekly until October (See: [Calendar](#)).

All sessions are available in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Russian. [Videos from Weeks 1 and 2](#) include the role of communities in HIV and COVID-19 responses, criminalization and policing in both epidemics, financing HIV programmes in the context of COVID-19, and the social determinants of health.

Featured Resources

The *Journal of the International AIDS Society* launched a [HIV and COVID-19 Virtual Issue](#) for emerging knowledge about SARS-CoV-2 and co-infection with HIV. The Virtual Issue will be updated to include new articles when published.

UNICEF's Children and AIDS Learning Collaborative presented a [webinar](#) (22 July) with Lynne Mofenson, technical advisor to the Research Programme at the EGPAF. The webinar shared a curated overview of the latest updates related to children, adolescents, pregnant women and HIV presented at *AIDS 2020* and the *COVID-19 Conference*.

NAM aidsmap updated [‘COVID-19 and coronavirus in people living with HIV’](#) to include research from *AIDS 2020*.

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