

COVID-19 and HIV: August Digest

26 August 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.

The digest is now published monthly. For previous issues: childrenandaids.org/COVID19andHIV-digest

COVID-19: IMPACT ON THE HIV EPIDEMIC AND PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

[The Biggest Monster’ Is Spreading. And It’s Not the Coronavirus](#)

3 August 2020, *New York Times*

This in-depth report describes how lockdowns and supply-chain disruptions caused by COVID-19 threaten progress against HIV, TB and malaria. As evidenced by dozens of interviews with public health officials, doctors and patients, disruptions are pronounced in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. One in four people with HIV reported trouble with treatment access.

[‘What if I Die?’: Coronavirus hits India’s tuberculosis care](#)

17 August 2020, *Reuters*

The lockdown in India has limited access to treatment and care for millions of patients with TB. Many people with TB report being scared to seek care, not receiving care at health centres and facing food insecurity.

[South Africa’s Poor Scramble for Anti-HIV Drugs amid Virus](#)

11 August 2020, *Associated Press*

In South Africa and around the world, COVID-19 has disrupted the supply of antiretroviral medications. The effects of the disruptions are particularly troubling for the poor and most vulnerable, who face heightened barriers in accessing treatment and care.

[COVID-19 Threatens Plans to Eliminate And Control Infectious Diseases, PAHO Director Says](#)

11 August 2020, *PAHO*

COVID-19 has caused over 390,000 deaths in the Americas and is now threatening to add more from TB, HIV, hepatitis and other infectious diseases. PAHO Director Carissa F. Etienne highlighted the pandemic’s impact on other diseases. Of people living with HIV, 30 per cent are avoiding seeking care; there are also concerns about antiretroviral supplies. *See also: [Reuters](#)*

[COVID-19 Disruptions Slow HIV Treatment Targets](#)

10 August 2020, *Uganda Radio Network*

The Director-General of Uganda AIDS Commission Nelson Musoba notes the impact of the lockdown on access to care for people living with HIV and gaps in receiving medicine refills. *See also: [Over 600 people living with HIV/AIDS fail to collect ARVs \(Daily Monitor Uganda\)](#)*

[Experts Call for Continued HIV Prevention Awareness](#)

10 August 2020, *Manila Standard*

In the Philippines, new HIV cases are rising, especially among young males, while COVID-19 is a barrier to early testing and linkage to treatment. UNAIDS Country Director noted the difficulties to access prevention services and treatment early in the lockdown and the importance of various stakeholders working together.

ADAPTING HIV PROGRAMMES AND HEALTH SYSTEMS TO COVID-19

[UNICEF’s HIV Programming in the Context of COVID-19: Sustaining the gains and reimagining the future for children, adolescents and women](#)

August 2020, *UNICEF*

UNICEF presents a compendium of innovative approaches to ensure the continuity of HIV services for children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper describes the approaches in Eastern and Southern Africa: Botswana, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

[PEPFAR’s Response to the Convergence of the HIV and COVID-19 Pandemics in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)

7 August 2020, *Journal of the International AIDS Society*

PEPFAR discusses the guidance adapted to ensure HIV programmes maintain essential services while protecting patients and staff during the pandemic. Efforts included decentralizing services as much as possible, leveraging virtual monitoring and support, and supporting both facility and community programming.

[AIDS: Rwanda Introduces New Testing Strategy to Bypass COVID-19 Limitations](#)

22 August 2020, *Kigali Today Press*

[COVID-19: transformative actions for more equitable, resilient, sustainable societies and health systems in the Americas](#)

3 August 2020, *BMJ Global Health*

PAHO makes recommendations to address gaps exposed by COVID-19 in the Americas. This includes (1) realigning values to better include health and social development with economic development; (2) investing in health, social development and protection, and (3) transforming health systems with a focus on primary health care.

[How to Stop COVID-19 Fueling a Resurgence of AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis](#)

12 August 2020, *Nature*

This editorial discusses what governments and funders can do to protect HIV, TB and malaria programmes during the pandemic. It makes recommendations to sustain priorities, refine models with real-world data, include public information campaigns and increase investments.

[HIV Self-Care and COVID-19: Lessons for the future of the HIV response](#)

4 August 2020, *TheBody*

To address COVID-19 disruptions in accessing care, the Rwanda Biomedical Center and AIDS Healthcare Foundation will distribute HIV self-test kits for free through existing condom kiosks, especially in high risk areas in Kigali and secondary cities.

As a response to COVID-19 and difficulties in accessing care, there have been more efforts to empower patients living with HIV. This includes scaling up self-testing and telemedicine as well as other innovations, such as providing WhatsApp counselling for young people.

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS AND CHILDREN

Understanding Characteristics of COVID-19 among children and adolescents

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) [announced](#) a project to develop approaches that identify children at high risk for the paediatric inflammatory syndrome related to COVID-19; up to US \$20 million in funding is available for research proposals over four years. Recent research on the syndrome include:

- [COVID-19 and multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children and adolescents](#) (*Lancet Infectious Diseases*)
- [Multisystem inflammatory syndrome associated with COVID-19 in children in Pakistan](#) and [Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children in South Africa](#) (*Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*)
- [COVID-19-associated multisystem inflammatory Syndrome in children — United States, March–July 2020](#) (*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*)

Transmission Risks Among Children

UNICEF researchers are investigating the burden of COVID-19 among children and young people. Selective testing for the virus might mean that many cases are still undiagnosed. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti released a [research brief](#) calling for more disaggregated data, especially in low- and middle-income countries where children are at greater risk of other vulnerabilities. *See also: 'COVID-19 may pose greater risk to children than originally thought'*

A [study](#) from Public Health England found low numbers of COVID-19 outbreaks in schools; out of more than 1 million children in preschool and primary school since June, there were only 67 cases and many of them were through transmission at home. Meanwhile, a [study](#) from Harvard Medical School researchers suggest that children may play a larger role in community spread of COVID-19; among 192 children in the study, 49 of which tested positive for the virus and an additional 18 had late-onset symptoms related to COVID-19. The researchers noted that children were especially contagious during the first two days of infection and had higher viral loads than hospitalized adults.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control released a [technical report](#) on COVID-19 in children in EU/EEA countries and the UK, including the role of school settings in COVID-19 transmission.

Policy and Global Recommendations

UNICEF and WHO issued [guidance](#) that children over 12 should wear masks, in line with recommendations for adults. For children ages six to 11, a risk-based approach is recommended with considerations like local transmission and interactions with high-risk individuals. Masks are not recommended for children aged 5 years and under.

UNICEF and WHO [urged](#) governments in Africa to promote the safe re-opening of schools in light of the negative impacts of school closures. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also [updated](#) guidance for schools and child-care centers with a focus on keeping them open as much as possible.

COVID-19 AND INEQUALITY

UNAIDS Calls for Urgent Action to Strengthen Social Protection Programmes in the Face of COVID-19

26 August 2020, *UNAIDS*

UNAIDS released a [call to action](#) for governments to strengthen HIV-sensitive social protection programmes that address the health and socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable people. This includes women and girls, gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, people who use drugs and transgender people.

Economic Impact of Coronavirus Zeroes in on Black LGBT+ Americans

4 August 2020, *Reuters*

According the Human Rights Campaign, Black LGBT+ people in the US are more likely to face high economic impacts of the pandemic compared to heterosexual white peers. *See also: [The COVID-19 Public Health and Economic Crises Leave Vulnerable Populations Exposed](#)*

COVID-19 has “Devastating” Effect on Women and Girls

1 August 2020, *The Lancet*

Experts are calling attention to the pandemic’s impact on women and girls through disrupted health services and increases in gender-based violence. COVID-19 restrictions have hurt reproductive health services and contraception supply chains, which also has potential effects on the risks of HIV transmission. *See also: [African Activists Fight Violence Against Women One Law at a Time](#)*

Extreme Poverty Rises and a Generation Sees Future Slip Away

10 August 2020, *AP*

As an effect of the pandemic, up to 100 million more people globally could fall into living on US \$1.90 a day. Most of those newly at risk of extreme poverty are in sub-Saharan Africa. This in-depth report describes the pandemic’s effects and economic disruptions in Ethiopia.

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

How COVID-19 Could Benefit Tuberculosis and HIV Services in South Africa

3 August 2020, *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*

Authors from Médecins Sans Frontières discuss how innovations developed for COVID-19 could be an opportunity for long-term change that can improve TB and HIV services in South Africa. This includes scaling up interventions that improve system-wide efficiency.

The Response to a New Pandemic Should Not Capture the Continued Treatment of Known Diseases

21 August 2020, *Namibia Economist*

Aeneas C. Chuma, UNAIDS Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa, writes that the focus on and investments in HIV and TB services should continue despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 response should not derail progress in other epidemics.

HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 Require Global Solidarity

29 July 2020, *IDN*

In an interview, UNAIDS Country Director for Kenya Medhin Tsehaiu discusses recommendations for HIV programmes and policies in the context of COVID-19.

Global Health and Human Rights for a Postpandemic World

3 August 2020, *BMJ Global Health*

The piece discusses reimagining global health for the post-pandemic world. While calls for global solidarity continue, COVID-19 has unveiled gaps in how we work together and stressed the need for a new social contract based on human rights.

Q&A: The impact of COVID-19 on HIV/AIDS

13 August 2020, *Devex*

Jun Yong Choi, director of the AIDS Research Institute at Yonsei University in South Korea discusses the impact of COVID-19 on the fight against HIV.

COVID-19: Patient voices and perspectives in Uganda

6 August 2020, *BMJ Opinion*

Executive Director Community Health and Information Network (CHAIN) Mariam Regina Namata Kamoga writes about how Uganda slowed down COVID-19 transmission and supported other health services, particularly through patient organizations and patient empowerment.

UPDATES ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

A collaboration was [announced](#) between the Serum Institute of India, Gavi and Gates Foundation to accelerate manufacturing and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines for low- and middle-income countries in 2021. The vaccines will be available to up to 92 countries in Gavi's COVAX Advance Market Commitment at a ceiling price of US \$3 per dose.

Moderna, which had previously said it would exclude people with HIV from its vaccine trials, [changed](#) its stance after pressure from HIV advocates in recent weeks. People living with HIV will be a part of its late-stage clinical trial.

STAT [featured](#) the evidence gap in COVID-19 vaccine safety for children and pregnant women. Clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines have so far not included women who are pregnant or breastfeeding; only one trial has included children. While vaccines are always tested in healthy adults first, the current state of urgency makes it possible that there could be emergency authorization for a vaccine that does not have safety data available for pregnant women and children.

The US Food and Drug Administration [issued](#) emergency authorization for the use of blood plasma from patients who have recovered from COVID-19 as a treatment. Some experts have called for caution, noting that there is still limited evidence on using convalescent plasma to treat COVID-19. A study by the Mayo Clinic and the NIH indicated that plasma treatments appeared to reduce mortality in hospitalized COVID-19 patients who received infusions within three days of symptom onset compared to patients who got plasma after four days or later. However, the study did not include a placebo group, was not randomized and has not been peer-reviewed. Several NIH officials stressed that more data from randomized controlled trials are needed to assess benefits ([New York Times](#)).

SELECTED RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

Modelling the Epidemics

Potential Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in HIV, Tuberculosis, and Malaria in Low-Income and Middle-Income Countries: A modelling study

1 September 2020, *Lancet Global Health*

The researchers constructed four scenarios with potential responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (no action, mitigation for 6 months, suppression for 2 months, or suppression for 1 year) and established models of HIV, TB and malaria to estimate the additional impact of the pandemic. In high-burden settings, deaths due to HIV, TB and malaria over 5 years could increase by up to 10 per cent, 20 per cent, and 36 per cent compared to projections without COVID-19.

Potential Effects of Disruption to HIV Programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa Caused by COVID-19: Results from multiple mathematical models

6 August 2020, *Lancet HIV*

Five models of HIV epidemics were used to estimate the effect of potential disruptions to HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services on HIV-related deaths and new infections in sub-Saharan Africa lasting 6 months over 1 year. The paper examines disruptions to ART access, prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programmes, condom distribution and voluntary medical male circumcision. *See, comment:* [Modelling the impact of COVID-19 on HIV](#)

Characteristics and Outcomes of COVID-19 in People Living with HIV

Two pre-print articles on COVID-19 mortality in the UK suggested that having HIV raised the risk of death for COVID-19 patients, after adjusting for age ([aidsmap](#), 13 August). The British HIV Association and partners released a [statement](#) calling for caution in interpreting these findings due to limited figures, under-recording and confounding factors that affect COVID-19 mortality. Both papers have not yet been peer-reviewed. Meanwhile, a number of recent publications suggested similar characteristics and outcomes among COVID-19 patients with HIV and those without HIV:

- [COVID-19 in patients with HIV-1 infection: A single-centre experience in northern Italy](#) (*Infection*, 3 August)
The case series included 26 patients with HIV and COVID-19. Among them, 5 patients were hospitalized with interstitial pneumonia but there were no admissions to intensive care. The researchers noted that COVID-19 associated with HIV infection had a clinical presentation comparable to the general population.
- [No significant effect of COVID-19 on immunological and virological parameters in patients with HIV-1 infection](#) (*Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes - JAIDS*, 1 September)
In this letter, investigators from Italy report on 14 patients with COVID and HIV. There was no difference in clinical characteristics and outcomes from cohorts of patients without HIV.
- [Outcomes among HIV-positive patients hospitalized with COVID-19](#) (*JAIDS*, 1 September)
This study described COVID-19 characteristics in 21 patients with HIV and 42 patients without HIV in the US. There was a trend toward increased rates of intensive care, mechanical ventilation, and mortality in patients with HIV compared to those without HIV; however, these differences were not statistically significant.

- [Coronavirus disease of 2019 in patients with well-controlled human immunodeficiency virus on antiretroviral therapy \(JAIDS, 1 September\)](#)

In this letter, investigators in the US discuss a retrospective chart review of 125 patients with COVID-19, of whom five also had HIV. All patients continued ART and had similar clinical outcomes to those without HIV.

In a recent issue of *AIDS*, publications described COVID-19 characteristics among people living with HIV:

- [Characteristics and outcomes of COVID-19 in patients with HIV: A multi-center research network study \(US\)](#)
- [Factors associated with hospital admission for COVID-19 in HIV patients \(Italy\)](#)
- [HIV infection and COVID-19 risk factors for severe disease \(France\)](#)
- [Clinical characteristics, risk factors, and incidence of symptomatic COVID-19 in adults living with HIV a single-center, prospective observational study \(Spain\)](#)

Some researchers are examining associations between ART use and COVID-19 characteristics. Recent papers include:

- [Effect of a previous history of antiretroviral treatment on clinical picture of patients with co-infection of SARS-CoV-2 and HIV: A preliminary study \(International Journal of Infectious Diseases, 22 August\)](#)
Through retrospective interviews, researchers examined how ART affects clinical characteristics of patients with SARS-CoV-2 and HIV. Among 20 COVID-19 patients with HIV, 12 had a history of ART. A milder inflammatory response to COVID-19 might be associated with a history of ART in patients living with HIV.
- [Coinfection with HIV and SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan, China: A 12-person case series \(JAIDS, 1 September\)](#)
This survey from China described 12 people with HIV who had COVID-19. Of the ten patients on ART, nine reported mild symptoms. Two were ART-naïve until hospitalization and had severe symptoms with COVID-19.

Impact of COVID-19 on People Living with HIV

[PrEP Retention and Prescriptions for Pregnant Women During COVID-19 Lockdown in South Africa](#)

3 August 2020, *Lancet HIV*

The researchers evaluated the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa on PrEP prescriptions and ANC visits among pregnant women enrolled in an ongoing cohort study. Before lockdown, 29 per cent of study participants on PrEP missed their one-month visit; this increased significantly to 63 per cent during the lockdown. Missing three-month visits increased to 55 per cent during the lockdown compared to 41 per cent before March 2020.

[The Psychosocial Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth Living with HIV in Western Kenya](#)

20 August 2020, *AIDS Behavior*

This survey conducted through telephone calls assessed psychosocial effects of COVID-19 among adolescents (aged 10-24) living with HIV in Kenya. Of 486 respondents, 9 per cent had mild depression symptoms and 1 per cent had moderate-to-severe depression symptoms. Young adults 20-24 years old had more depressive symptoms than the younger age groups.

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

[Stigma, Discrimination and Gender-based Violence in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Young key populations in Asia and the Pacific](#)

11 August 2020

The Interagency Task Team (IATT) on Young Key Populations (YKPs) in Asia and the Pacific discuss the need to address stigma, discrimination and all forms of violence against YKPs during the pandemic.

[Technical Brief on COVID-19 and HIV Programming](#)

31 July 2020

Frontline AIDS released technical guidance on programming in areas where COVID-19 and HIV intersect.

[Socio-economic Impact and Social Protection for YKP And YPLHIV In Time of COVID-19](#)

11 August 2020

The IATT on YKPs in Asia and the Pacific assessed how the COVID-19 pandemic affects the lives of YKPs and young people living with HIV. and provided recommendations to address the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on young people.

[Communities Speak Out](#)

UPDATED August 2020

Aidsfonds published a series on how COVID-19 affects the HIV response. In the latest story, Nicholas Niwagaba of the Uganda Network of Young People Living with HIV [speaks](#) about local work and challenges faced.

[Zero Discrimination in the Time of COVID-19](#)

10 August 2020

The IATT on YKPs with partners developed a social media package to advocate against stigma and discrimination in the time of COVID-19. Drawing on lessons from the HIV response, this resource centers kindness and respect for the COVID-19 discourse online and offline.

[How COVID-19 is Affecting the Global Response to AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#)

21 August 2020

Friends of the Global Fight presents information on the impact of COVID-19 on HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria including recent research and news.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **6 July-October 2020:** The HIV2020 Conference began on 6 July. It will continue as a series of 2-hour sessions weekly until October. *Multiple times, free of charge* >> [Calendar](#)
- **9 September 2020:** The International Antiviral Society-USA hosts researchers discussing HIV PrEP and the impact of COVID-19 on PrEP use. *10am PT | 7:00pm SAST* >> [More](#)

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