

COVID-19 and HIV: September Digest

23 September 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/covid19/digest

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

HIV and COVID-19: A unique moment in time to learn, leverage and build resilient systems for health

9 September 2020, *UNAIDS*

A new [report](#) from UNAIDS describes how countries are using experiences and infrastructure from the HIV response to tackle both pandemics. Three important issues for countries are highlighted: (1) lessons from the HIV response should inform COVID-19 responses; (2) the HIV infrastructure is already driving COVID-19 responses and has the potential to catalyze accelerated progress; and (3) COVID-19 and HIV responses offer a historic opportunity to build a bridge to adaptable, results-driven systems for health.

In WHO Global Pulse Survey, 90% of Countries Report Disruptions to Essential Health Services Since COVID-19

31 August 2020, *WHO*

The WHO published a [survey](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on health systems with reports from 105 countries in five regions. Almost every country experienced disruption to its health services; low- and middle-income countries reported the greatest difficulties. Cancer screenings and treatment, and HIV therapy has seen significant interruptions in low-income countries.

People with HIV Face New Challenges to Care Continuity During COVID Lockdown

15 September 2020, *TheBody*

TheBody surveyed people living with HIV about their health care experiences during the pandemic. While some reported that their access to services continued, particularly through innovations such as telehealth sessions, a number of respondents noted related challenges such as worsened mental health.

Pandemic vs. Pandemic: COVID-19 hampers fight against HIV

14 September 2020, *Associated Press*

In the United States, COVID-19 has threatened the progress made in the fight against HIV. Experts are concerned about a spike in new HIV infections, particularly in agricultural regions of the South. Testing for HIV has dropped and health workers who usually track patients have been redirected to COVID-19 efforts.

See also: [How Were HIV Care Services in South Carolina Interrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic?](#) (*AJMC*)

COVID-19 Sets HIV Treatment and Testing Back

4 September 2020, *Mail & Guardian*

In South Africa, testing for HIV at public health facilities declined 57 per cent during the first month of the COVID-19 lockdown. The data from the national health department suggests that community testing of HIV was stopped due to the shutdown and accounted for the largest decreases in HIV testing. The restrictions on movement also hindered treatment rates.

About 900,000 People Living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria Unaccounted for — Group

17 September 2020, *Premium Times*

The Civil Society for HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (CiSHAN) highlighted the gaps in HIV testing and treatment; currently, around 900,000 persons living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria are unaccounted for. A national campaign for HIV self-testing began with an aim of reaching 10 mil people with self-testing kits by the end of 2020. The group noted the impact of the COVID-19 in limiting access to HIV testing, especially for vulnerable populations.

ADAPTING HIV PROGRAMMES AND HEALTH SYSTEMS TO COVID-19

Adapting HIV Services for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women, Infants, Children, Adolescents and Families in Resource-Constrained Settings during COVID-19

12 September 2020, *JIAS*

Authors from USAID discussed strategies to maintain essential HIV services for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children. Recommended programme adaptations include bundling services in a visit, providing testing outside of facilities to the extent possible to reduce exposure risk to COVID-19, using virtual platforms to identify vulnerable children, community-based ART initiation, and multi-month ART.

Going the Last Mile for HIV in Zimbabwe during COVID-19

11 September 2020, *PSI*

COVID-19 Brings Jamaican People Living with HIV Closer Together

18 September 2020, *UNAIDS*

Community organizations like the Jamaica Network of Seropositives (JN+) connected with their networks immediately after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to better understand their needs, and played a critical role in supporting people to start and remain on ART.

See also: [Providing HIV treatment to people living with HIV stranded in foreign countries in Middle East and North Africa region during COVID-19](#) (*UNAIDS*)

Guyana's HIV Food Bank Comes to the Rescue during COVID-19

4 September 2020, *UNAIDS*

After Zimbabwe began a lockdown in March, many health services were paused, including voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC). PSI worked with government partners to ensure services delivered by the Last Mile for HIV team, including VMMC, were declared essential and service delivery was adapted to the COVID-19 context.

In the last fourteen years, the National AIDS Programme in Guyana has invested in developing a food bank for people living with HIV, including those coinfecting with TB. This food bank has played a critical role in providing a nutrition support solution for people living with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS AND CHILDREN

Understanding COVID-19 among Children and Adolescents

In the UK, a group of practitioners and experts developed a [national consensus management pathway](#) as guidance for clinicians caring for children with the paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome associated with COVID-19.

Recent publications on COVID-19 in young people include:

- [Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children: A systematic review](#), *EClinicalMedicine*
- [Reconsidering assumptions of adolescent and young adult SARS-CoV-2 transmission](#), *Clinical Infectious Diseases*
- [A Systematic Review of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children Associated With SARS-CoV-2 Infection](#), *The Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*
- [Syndrome Resembling Kawasaki Disease in COVID-19 Asymptomatic Children](#), *Journal of Infection and Public Health*

A [new study](#) from Yale researchers examined serum and cell samples obtained from paediatric and adult patients with COVID-19 and found that children express higher levels of two specific serum cytokines. The researchers believe this might be associated with the less severe COVID-19 characteristics and outcomes in children.

Impact of COVID-19 on Children

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus [noted](#) that more research is needed to understand risk factors of severe COVID-19 in children and adolescents. The long-term effects of infection remain unknown. ([UN News](#)) UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore highlighted the long-term impacts of the pandemic on children, especially due to the closure of schools. Around a third of children (463 million) were unable to access any kind of remote learning when schools closed. School closures also have impacts for health, protection, and nutrition. ([The Telegraph](#))

Global agencies have recommended that the decision to close schools be taken only as a last resort and temporary measure at the local level. UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO issued [updated guidance](#) on school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19.

COVID-19 AND SECONDARY IMPACTS

Gates Offers Grim Global Health Report, and Some Optimism

14 September 2020, *New York Times*

The Gates Foundation launched its fourth annual [Goalkeepers report](#), which discusses how the pandemic is affecting progress toward the Global Goals. Bill Gates noted that one of his aims is to double foreign aid from the US from less than 0.25 per cent of the gross domestic product to 0.5 per cent or more.

The Other Way COVID Will Kill: Hunger

11 September 2020, *New York Times*

Global levels of hunger are on the rise. According to the World Food Programme, the number of individuals experiencing food insecurity in the developing world is expected to nearly double to 265 million. The number of children younger than 5 experiencing wasting is likely to grow by nearly seven million this year.

COVID is Widening Educational Inequalities for Children Around the World

16 September 2020, *Inequality.org*

As schools remain closed in many countries and families consider keeping their children home even where schools are open, inequalities in education are set to rise. For those without internet access and facing other barriers at home, the adapted methods many schools are using to deliver education will remain more unreachable.

See also: [COVID-19 Pandemic an Opportunity to Re-evaluate How We Treat World's Starving Children](#) (*IPS*)

Why COVID School Closures Are Making Girls Marry Early

7 September 2020, *The Guardian*

As schools closed in March due to COVID-19, child protection experts predicted that many children might never return to the classroom. There is now growing evidence that school closures have led to an increase in gender-based violence and early marriages.

See also: [School Closures Heighten the Risks of Unwanted Pregnancy and Contracting HIV for Adolescent Girls and Young Women](#) (*aidspace*), ['It ruined my life': School closures in Kenya lead to rise in FGM](#) (*Al Jazeera*)

From Leprosy to COVID-19, How Stigma Makes It Harder to Fight Epidemics

16 September 2020, *Science*

Stigma is a critical barrier to the COVID-19 response, as it has been for other health issues in the past including HIV. COVID-19 often provides an excuse to stigmatize communities who are already marginalized. Stigma is preventing individuals from getting the testing and treatment they need.

Coronavirus: Why are women paying a heavier price?

11 September 2020, *Al Jazeera*

The COVID-19 pandemic is worsening existing gender inequalities. Economic hardships due to the pandemic are particularly devastating for women, who account for 54 per cent of overall job losses despite being 39 per cent of the global workforce. Women are also more likely to be at increased health risks at the frontline and face additional barriers in access to health care.

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

COVID-19 Is a Turning Point for Infectious Diseases

16 September 2020, *Devex*

Peter Sands, executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, describes findings of the [Results Report](#) for 2019 and notes that the 2020 results will look different. He writes that we are at an inflection point and risking the gains made thus far in infectious diseases unless quick, coordinated actions are taken.

Fighting the COVID Infodemic

18 September 2020, *Project Syndicate*

Professors Anton Pozniak, Linda-Gail Bekker and Chris Beyrer write about the need to counter the COVID-19 infodemic with coordinated and strategic advocacy like for the HIV epidemic. Scientists must counter lies and myths while addressing the spread of misinformation in today's age.

The Need to Continue Testing for HIV, Even During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic

2 September 2020, *HIV Medicine*

Researchers from Italy report a series of four patients who were hospitalized between March and April with suspicion of COVID-19 but were instead diagnosed with HIV infection. They strongly advocate for continued HIV testing even during the COVID-19 context.

Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Children

16 September 2020, *Inter Press Service*

Chair of The Elders and former President of Ireland Mary Robinson writes about the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women. Women are facing increased rates of violence, the loss of livelihoods, limited access to contraception and other sexual and reproductive health services, and other risks.

What One Pandemic Can Teach Us in Facing Another

1 October 2020, *AIDS*

Global HIV expert Wafaa El-Sadr outlines the similarities and differences between the HIV and COVID-19 pandemics as well as the lessons learned from years of fighting HIV that are relevant to the COVID-19 response.

See also: [Preserving 2 decades of healthcare gains for Africa in the coronavirus disease 2019 era](#) (*AIDS*)

More Testing Alone Will Not Get Us Out of This Pandemic

1 September 2020, *Nature*

Health and other disparities, distrust in health systems faced by many communities, and other complexities must be explicitly factored into solutions for COVID-19. We cannot assume that we should first find a technological solution and only then engage with communities to learn what is needed for their access and participation.

SELECTED RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

COVID-19 More Prevalent Among General vs HIV-Positive Population, Barcelona Study Says

11 September 2020, *AJMC*

An observational cohort study from Spain [published](#) in *AIDS* reported that people living with HIV may not be at greater risk for COVID-19. The researchers investigated clinical characteristics, risk factors of COVID-19 diagnosis and severity, and standardized incidence rate ratios for people diagnosed COVID-19 in the cohort and in the general population of Barcelona. The results did not indicate an association between HIV or ART-related factors and a greater likelihood of being positive for SARS-CoV-2 or having a more severe form of COVID-19.

Characteristics, Comorbidities, and Outcomes in a Multicenter Registry of Patients with HIV and Coronavirus Disease-19

9 September 2020, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*

This prospective study from the US included 286 people living with HIV with lab-confirmed COVID-19. Several comorbidities, including hypertension and lung disease, were associated with worse outcomes. The study also reported a link between severe outcomes and lower CD4.

See also: [High prevalence of underlying health conditions explains increased COVID-19 mortality seen in people with HIV in US study](#) (*aidsmap*)

Risk Factors For COVID-19 Death in a Population Cohort Study from the Western Cape Province, South Africa

28 August 2020, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*

In a study from South Africa, HIV and TB were independently associated with an increased risk for COVID-19 mortality. The study included more than 22,000 patients with COVID-19. The researchers noted that the increased risk of COVID-19 death may be over-estimated if there is residual confounding due to socioeconomic status or comorbidities. However, they also concluded that the results with sensitivity analyses suggest that people living with HIV or TB are at increased risk of severe COVID-19. *See also, summary:* [Healio](#)

Clinical Outcomes of Patients with COVID-19 And HIV Coinfection

19 September 2020, *Journal of Medical Virology*

This retrospective cohort study of HIV patients who were admitted for COVID-19 in the U.S. compared their clinical characteristics and outcomes with a matched control group of COVID-19 patients without HIV. There were 23 patients with HIV. The rates of in-hospital deaths, the need for mechanical ventilation and intensive care admission were 13 per cent, 9 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively. Outcomes were comparable between the HIV and control groups.

A recent issue of *AIDS* included a special section on how COVID-19 manifests among people living with HIV. Submissions describe outcomes of COVID-19 among people with HIV from Europe and the United States in comparison to people not living with HIV. Articles include:

- [Coronavirus disease 2019 attack rate in HIV-infected patients and in preexposure prophylaxis users](#) (France)
- [HIV infection and COVID-19: risk factors for severe disease](#) (France)
- [Clinical characteristics, risk factors, and incidence of symptomatic coronavirus disease 2019 in a large cohort of adults living with HIV: a single-center, prospective observational study](#) (Spain)
- [Disproportionate burden of coronavirus disease 2019 among racial minorities and those in congregate settings among a large cohort of people with HIV](#) (U.S.)
- [Clinical characteristics, comorbidities and outcomes among persons with HIV hospitalized with coronavirus disease 2019 in Atlanta, Georgia](#) (U.S.)
- [Comorbidity indices in people with HIV and considerations for coronavirus disease 2019 outcomes](#) (UK)

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

<p>COVID-19 and HIV: 1 moment, 2 epidemics, 3 opportunities—how to seize the moment to learn, leverage and build a new way forward for everyone’s health and rights 9 September 2020</p> <p>The report from UNAIDS discusses lessons from HIV for COVID-19, how the HIV infrastructure is driving COVID-19 responses, and how the response offers a historic opportunity to build strong health systems.</p>	<p>PEPFAR Technical Guidance in Context of COVID-19 Pandemic UPDATED 9 September 2020</p> <p>PEPFAR updated its technical guidance. The latest additions include mental health resources for health workers and information on older adults with HIV as well as presentations on adapting DREAMS programmes in Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia.</p>	<p>Are Funders Still Focusing On HIV/AIDS? September 2020</p> <p>GrantWatch from <i>Health Affairs</i> tracks funding on HIV/AIDS, including from major private philanthropies. This round-up includes examples of foundation activities related to HIV and AIDS.</p>
<p>The IATT on YKPS Launches a New Website to Highlight Young People’s Leadership in Response to COVID-19 Across Asia and the Pacific WEBSITE 27 August 2020</p> <p>The Interagency Task Team on Young Key Populations in Asia Pacific, with support from Youth LEAD, UNAIDS, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and UNDP announced the launch of www.ykptaskteam.org.</p>	<p>Updated Website from the HIV and Humanitarian Emergencies Interagency Task Team WEBSITE September 2020</p> <p>Partners of the Interagency Task Team on HIV in Emergencies (HIV-E) released a new website, www.hivinemergencies.org, with tools and resources on addressing HIV in the context of humanitarian emergencies.</p>	<p>COVID-19 in Africa: Webinar with Africa CDC, WACI Health and civil society VIDEO 16 September 2020</p> <p>WACI Health, AVAC, and Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, TB and Malaria hosted a virtual dialogue to discuss how COVID-19 is impacting Africa and learn about the collective response in different countries.</p>
<p>COVID-19 Resources for People Working in the HIV Sector UPDATED 11 September 2020</p> <p>Avert compiled a list of timely resources for people working on the HIV response globally, including updated guidance, communication tools, resources for community health and peer support, information on COVID-19 and HIV, and COVID-19 in Africa.</p>	<p>Live with Dr. Anthony S. Fauci: COVID-19 and its global impact on AIDS, TB and malaria VIDEO 11 September 2020</p> <p>Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria hosted a conversation with Dr. Anthony Fauci on how COVID-19 is impacting low- and middle-income countries and the role of the US.</p>	<p>AidsmapCHAT: COVID-19 and HIV – Series 2 VIDEO 2 September 2020</p> <p>Aidsmap released a second virtual chat on HIV and COVID-19. Speakers were Davina Conner from the Prevention Access Campaign; Jason Domino, sex worker, activist and PrEP advocate; and Dr Vanessa Apea, sexual health and HIV doctor.</p>
<p>Antigen-detection in the Diagnosis Of SARS-Cov-2 Infection Using Rapid Immunoassays 11 September 2020</p> <p>This document from WHO provides guidance on the potential role of antigen-detecting rapid diagnostic tests (Ag-RDT) for COVID-19 and explains the need for careful test selection.</p>	<p>Corticosteroids for COVID-19 2 September 2020</p> <p>WHO partnered with Magic Evidence Ecosystem Foundation (MAGIC), investigators of seven trials on corticosteroids, and a panel of experts to conduct trials and develop living guidance for COVID-19 drug treatments.</p>	<p>Diagnostic Testing for SARS-CoV-2 11 September 2020</p> <p>WHO released guidance for laboratories and other stakeholders about COVID-19 testing. This covers lab testing, assessment and biosafety strategies and tools; point-of-care immunodiagnostic tests; rapid immunoassays; investigations of clusters; and surveillance.</p>

UPCOMING EVENTS

- *September-October 2020*: From Global Health Strategies, the UNGA Guide Virtual is a crowdsourced calendar for events around the UN General Assembly (UNGA) including those focused on COVID-19. >> [More](#)
- *29 September 2020*: PMNCH, White Ribbon Alliance and Every Woman Every Child will host ‘Accountability Breakfast 2020: Advancing Women, Children and Adolescent Health During COVID-19’. *8am ET* >> [Register](#)
- *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](#)
- *15 October 2020*: CHIVA annual conference on ‘Breaking through barriers: Achieving health and wellbeing for young people growing up with HIV’. *9am-5pm UK* >> [Register](#)
- *13-15 October 2020*: Women Leaders in Global Health Conference 2020 will take place over the course of three days, with the first two focused on South Asia and Africa. *Multiple times* >> [More](#)

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