

COVID-19 and HIV: October Digest

3 November 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

COVID-19's Impact on HIV Treatment Less Severe Than Feared

16 October 2020, *UNAIDS*

UNAIDS, WHO and UNICEF collected data through an [online platform](#) to identify national, regional and global disruptions of routine HIV services caused by COVID-19. Data from 22 countries suggest that the pandemic's impact on HIV treatment might be less severe than initially predicted. Only five countries reported monthly declines in the number of people on HIV treatment since April. One challenge in interpreting this trend is that many countries have a three-month lost-to-follow-up definition so there might be a delay in counting people who are disengaged from treatment.

See also: [COVID-19's impact on HIV vertical transmission services reversed](#) (UNAIDS)

Seven Months On, Pandemic Still Threatens AIDS Care

12 October 2020, *The Jakarta Post*

In Indonesia, there are about 543,000 people living with HIV/AIDS. The COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges in ensuring ARV drug supplies, especially in the early weeks of the pandemic. Two organizations noted in March that 47.6 per cent of survey respondents living with HIV had only a month's worth of ART. To note, even before the pandemic, ART coverage in Indonesia was among the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region.

See also, from the Philippines: [Covid-19 pandemic delays HIV/AIDS interventions](#) (SunStar)

PrEP Uptake Defies COVID-19 in 2020

14 October 2020, AVAC

According to the Q3 updates to the Global PrEP Tracker by AVAC, uptake of PrEP continued to increase globally despite disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of people who have started on PrEP has reached 773,474 this year, which is an increase in new initiations of more than 23 per cent since the beginning of 2020.

COVID-19 Impacting HIV Testing in Most Countries

13 October 2020, *UNAIDS*

Data on HIV testing services, [collected](#) by UNAIDS in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF show that there have been sustained decreases in testing access across 56 countries who reported at least one month of HIV testing data in the period between January and June, only 17 had enough data to calculate these trends over time. Five countries (Myanmar, Mozambique, Madagascar, Rwanda and Armenia) have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels of HIV testing; however, testing coverage remains low in other countries, such as Guyana and Peru.

COVID-19 Has Created Serious Challenges for Nigeria's HIV Organizations

23 September 2020, *TheBody*

The pandemic-related lockdown affected how many HIV organizations deliver services in Nigeria. The AIDS Prevention Initiative in Nigeria (APIN), noted difficulties in getting ART to their clients while AIDS Healthcare Foundation Nigeria discussed the delays in getting ART refills from abroad. People living with HIV faced challenges in accessing the services during the lockdown.

See also: [Africa: 'HIV/AIDS deaths may have soared due to virus'](#) (Anadolu Agency)

'Corona Carriers': Stigma halts medication and meet-ups for HIV+ Malawians

12 October 2020, Reuters

Stigma against people living with HIV in Malawi is making it harder for them to access health care services during the COVID-19 pandemic. There has also been a 35 per cent drop in HIV testing. A youth-led support group for those living with HIV noted how lockdown restrictions have complicated how their support groups function.

ADAPTING HIV PROGRAMMES AND HEALTH SYSTEMS TO COVID-19

Rapid Adaptation of HIV Treatment Programs in Response to COVID-19 — Namibia, 2020

23 October 2020, *Morbidity and Mortality Report*

Steven Y. Hong of the Division of Global HIV and TB at the CDC and colleagues write about Namibia's experience coordinating its national HIV treatment program with the COVID-19 response. The Ministry of Health's adapted plan aimed to minimize the frequency of patient contact with the health care system and reduce burden on facilities. This plan included facility readiness,

CDC Tanzania and Partners: Ensure HIV services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

28 October 2020, *CDC*

The CDC with the Government of Tanzania, non-governmental partners, and healthcare facilities supported COVID-19 prevention measures and aimed to optimize the continuity of essential services for people living with HIV. This included promoting key COVID-19 prevention measures such as social distancing, face masks, and hand hygiene as well protocols to minimize

<p>multimonth dispensing of ART, and the expansion of community ART dispensing.</p>	<p>disruptions in facility-based care, prevent long queues, and congested waiting areas.</p>
<p>How the HIV Response is Adapting in the Face of COVID-19 9 October 2020, <i>Frontline AIDS</i></p> <p>A new report Transforming the HIV response highlight some innovations from Frontline AIDS partners to continue HIV services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Civil society and community organizations have stepped in where governments have failed to support services for marginalized communities. These organizations developed differentiated services designed to meet the varied needs of people during the pandemic.</p>	<p>“Physical Distance, Not Social Distance”: Supporting Jamaican women living with HIV during COVID-19 21 September 2020, <i>UNAIDS</i></p> <p>The Jamaica Community of Positive Women (JCW+) noted that many clients received only one month’s supply of HIV treatment, although they were hoping for the recommended three months. The new screening protocols during the pandemic have also contributed to unexpected disclosure of HIV status. JCW+ is using hygiene supply packages supported by UNAIDS as an entry point to connect with clients during the pandemic.</p>
<p>Bringing HIV and COVID-19 Testing Services to Hard-to-Reach Areas in Uzbekistan 30 September 2020, <i>UNAIDS</i></p> <p>A mobile clinic with medical equipment and diagnostic systems, including for HIV and COVID-19, in Uzbekistan is providing people in different regions with access to HIV testing and counselling. The clinic was donated as part of a technical assistance programme supported by the Russian Government implemented by UNAIDS in partnership with the Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing (Rospotrebnadzor) and AIDS Infoshare.</p> <p>See also, in the U.S.: Why Not Test for HIV Along With COVID-19? (POZ)</p>	<p>Maintaining Robust HIV and Tuberculosis Services in the COVID-19 Era: A public health dilemma in Zimbabwe 23 September 2020, <i>International Journal of Infectious Diseases</i></p> <p>In Zimbabwe, many resources meant for HIV and TB programmes are being diverted to the COVID-19 response. This includes labs, equipment, health workers, and other resources. Fewer people are conducting HIV and TB testing. Strong mass media campaign on COVID-19 may be increasing fear and contributing to why patients with HIV, TB, and other chronic disease are not attending facilities. The author notes that there is an urgent need to protect HIV and TB services from the verticalization of COVID-19 services, especially at some of the better-resourced national health institutions.</p>

SELECTED RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

COVID-19 Characteristics in People Living with HIV

According to research presented at IDWeek, held virtually 21-25 October 2020, the prevalence of HIV among patients hospitalized with COVID-19 appears to be higher compared with the general population. The analysis examined 14 studies with 144,795 patients hospitalized with COVID-19; 592 among those were living with HIV. The pooled prevalence of HIV in patients with COVID-19 was 1.22% (95% CI, 0.61-2.43%), double the prevalence of 0.65% (95% CI, 0.48-0.89%) in the general population. See: [People with HIV May Have a Higher Susceptibility to COVID-19](#)

R&D for COVID-19 Vaccines and Therapeutics

A commentary for [The Lancet](#) suggested that some COVID-19 vaccines contain a certain adenovirus strain that could make people more susceptible to HIV. The researchers refer to four vaccine candidates containing adenovirus 5, or Ad5, as a “vector” to carry in the surface protein gene of SARS-CoV-2. They noted that in a clinical trial they conducted for an experimental HIV vaccine more than 10 years ago, they found that uncircumcised men who had been naturally infected with Ad5 before receiving the vaccine were more vulnerable to HIV. See: [Could certain COVID-19 vaccines leave people more vulnerable to the AIDS virus?](#)

The clinical trials for a vaccine candidate at Oxford University [will soon include](#) a subgroup study to understand immune responses in people living with HIV. The HIV substudy will enroll 60 adults with HIV and continue for a year. Pfizer [broadened](#) the clinical trials of its vaccine candidate to include children as well as people with HIV, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C.

The combination antiretroviral pill Kaletra (lopinavir/ritonavir), which is used to treat HIV, [did not appear](#) to be useful to treat COVID-19 in people with moderate to severe symptoms in the large RECOVERY trial. The trial enrolled around 12,000 COVID-19 patients at 176 hospitals in the UK. Findings were published in [The Lancet](#). From Madrid, a study in the [Open Forum Infectious Diseases](#) suggests that tenofovir-based HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) does not provide protection against SARS-CoV-2 infections or improve the course of COVID-19 disease.

Impact of COVID-19 on People Living with HIV

The Union’s Centre for Operational Research released the [mid-term report](#) of the impact of COVID-19 on TB case detection and treatment and HIV testing and treatment in the capital cities of Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The analyses included: (1) a direct comparison of 6-month aggregate TB and HIV numbers between March-August 2019 and March-August 2020 and (2) trends in key TB and HIV numbers in the COVID-19 period related to interventions designed to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus on TB and HIV services. Overall, Nairobi, Lilongwe and Harare saw marked declines in TB case finding and HIV testing during the first six-months of the COVID-19 outbreak.

A study presented at IDWeek noted that the COVID-19 pandemic did not cause HIV treatment interruptions during the numerous global trials assessing long-acting cabotegravir and rilpivirine for ART. The analysis included 1,744 patients in six trials conducted in 16 countries; overall, 93 per cent saw no pandemic-related interruptions to their dosing schedule. See: [Pandemic did not interrupt HIV treatment during trials assessing long-acting ART](#)

A [short report in *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*](#) described the early impact that COVID-19 and associated control measures on the sexual behaviour of PrEP users in Wales. The researchers used online surveys that questions about PrEP use, sex and relationships, health behaviours and beliefs, symptoms commonly attributed to PrEP use, and healthcare contacts. The introduction of social distancing measures and changes to PrEP services in Wales was associated with a marked reduction in reports of condomless sexual intercourse. There was a larger reduction in those who were single compared with those who were not.

The recent issue of *AIDS and Behaviour* included the following articles on the impact of COVID-19 on HIV services and people living with HIV:

- [Covid-19 and Gender in LMICs: Potential Lessons from HIV Pandemic](#)
- [“Everything is a Mess”: How COVID-19 is Impacting Engagement with HIV Testing Services in Rural Southwestern Uganda](#)
- [Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on HIV Testing and Assisted Partner Notification Services, Western Kenya](#)
- [Reimagining the Future of HIV Service Implementation in the Philippines Based on Lessons from COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Lockdowns: Impact on Facility-Based HIV Testing and the Case for the Scaling Up of Home-Based Testing Services in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)
- [When Home is Not a Safe Place: Impacts of Social Distancing Directives on Women Living with HIV](#)

COVID-19 AND SECONDARY IMPACTS

UN Chief Urges Greater Investment in Universal Health Coverage, Starting Now

7 October 2020, *UN News*

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched his latest policy brief, “[COVID-19 and Universal Health Coverage](#)”. The Secretary-General called for greater investments in universal health coverage in light of the COVID-19 pandemic’s renewed emphasis on the need for strong public health systems and emergency preparedness globally.

WHO: Global TB progress at risk

14 October 2020, *WHO*

A report from WHO suggests that global targets for TB prevention and treatment will likely be missed without urgent action. In 2019, approximately 1.4 million people died from TB-related illnesses and disruptions in services due to COVID-19 have led to further setbacks. Data from over 200 countries show significant reductions in TB case notifications; in the three high-burden countries (India, Indonesia, Philippines), there were 25-30 per cent drops in case notifications between January and June 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

See also: [1.8M people could die from tuberculosis in 2020: WHO](#) (*Devex*)

Africa 'Needs \$1.2tn' to Recover Coronavirus Losses

10 October 2020, *BBC*

The International Monetary Fund notes that Africa needs US\$1.2 trillion over the next three years to recover from the economic damage and health costs caused by the pandemic. IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva called for an extension of the moratorium by the G20 of debt repayments and asked for more funds to be available to lend.

Pandemic Driving Children Back to Work, Jeopardizing Gains

15 October 2020, *Associated Press*

The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting children’s access to education and causing more instances of child labor. UNICEF noted that the repercussions would be felt in economies and societies for decades to come. For at least 463 million children, there is no possibility of remote learning during the pandemic when the schools are closed. In many countries, children are going to work to support families facing financial crises due to COVID-19 and related restrictions.

See also: [Keeping girls in school seen worth billions to developing nations](#) (*Reuters*)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

Leveraging the Advances in HIV for COVID-19

3 October 2020, *The Lancet*

In this commentary, experts note how advances in confronting the global HIV epidemic have had a positive impact on the COVID-19 response. Lessons learnt from scaling up community testing for HIV and delivering ART particularly to people with limited access to care or those experiencing disproportionate barriers will be applicable in the roll-out of COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. Investments in COVID-19 research will also benefit HIV testing, treatment, and prevention.

COVID-19, Ebola, and HIV — Leveraging Lessons to Maximize Impact

7 October 2020, *The New England Journal of Medicine*

Researchers with experience in HIV/AIDS and Ebola write about the need to build COVID-19 responses based on the lessons the response to both infectious diseases. A specific point is ensuring interventions are not siloed into biomedical and behavioral categories since preventive and therapeutic interventions such as testing, masking, and staying in quarantine all have social components. There is also a need to build and sustain public trust particularly through community partnerships.

Lessons from AIDS for the COVID-19 Pandemic

3 October 2020, *Scientific American*

Professor William A. Haseltine writes about how the COVID-19 response should be built on the lessons learned from tackling HIV. From the decades of the war against AIDS, doctors, virologists, epidemiologists and public health experts have learned crucial lessons that can be applied to COVID-19. This includes not relying on vaccines as guarantees, understanding the importance of human behavior, and building on the knowledge and tools gained while fighting earlier outbreaks.

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>The Pandemic Paradox - HIV on the Edge VIDEOS Jul-Oct 2020</p> <p>The CSIS Global Health Policy Center (GHPC) presents a docuseries and feature film on the risk of a resurgent HIV/AIDS epidemic. The project features many prominent voices on HIV/AIDS, such as the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci and former UNAIDS Chief Peter Piot.</p>	<p>ENGAGED AND HEARD! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement October 2020</p> <p>UNICEF released guidelines to support meaningful and equitable adolescent participation and civic engagement, included for HIV. This includes guidance on: conceptual understanding, main strategies and key interventions, organizational commitment and processes, and monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<p>The Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescent Girls and Young Women and Needed Responses 15 October 2020</p> <p>The Friends of the Global Fight released an issue brief on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent girls and young women, who are particularly impacted by HIV/ AIDS, TB and malaria.</p>
<p>PEPFAR Technical Guidance in Context of COVID-19 Pandemic UPDATED 28 October 2020</p> <p>PEPFAR updated its technical guidance. The latest additions are included in the sections on HIV treatment for children, integrated women’s health, OVC, and faith and community-based organizations.</p>	<p>aidsmapWOMEN: Taking care of your health/COVID-19 special VIDEO October 2020</p> <p>In this Aidsmap series for women living with HIV, Susan Cole talks to her guests about the issues women with HIV are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	<p>Conference Bulletins: HIV Glasgow 2020 October 2020</p> <p>The 2020 International Congress on Drug Therapy in HIV Infection (HIV Glasgow) took place from 5 to 8 October 2020. <i>NAM aidsmap</i> has summaries of the research presented.</p>
<p>The HIV and COVID-19 Global Pandemics - Lessons for responding to both viruses WEBINAR 26 October 2020</p> <p>The 2020 Melbourne University Chemical Society’s Lady Masson Lecture featured Professor Sharon Lewin AO, Director of the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection Control and Immunity, discussing lessons from HIV and COVID-19 responses.</p>	<p>Highlights from the 51st Union World Conference on Lung Health October 2020</p> <p>Conference sessions and e-posters from the 51st Union World Conference on Lung Health are available for registered participants to watch on the conference platform until 30 November.</p>	<p>Live with Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim: COVID-19 and its Global Impact WEBINAR 29 October 2020</p> <p>Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria hosted a conversation with Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim to discuss focusing on women in the COVID-19 and HIV responses.</p>

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 4 November 2020: Frontline AIDS hosts a discussion on “A People’s vaccine for COVID-19: What does it mean to the HIV movement and why should we get involved?.” 11a–12p CET. >> [Register](#)
- 12 November 2020: CHAI hosts a webinar to discuss key trends in the HIV space, including COVID-19’s impact. “Ensuring HIV Care Continuity and Market Stability During COVID-19.” 8am–9am ET. >> [More](#)
- 16-17 November 2020: The International Workshop on HIV Pediatrics focuses on research in HIV prevention and treatment in a paediatric population. This year, it will include sessions on COVID-19 in children. >> [More](#)
- 2 February 2021: The International AIDS Society (IAS) announced its second COVID-19 virtual meeting focused on infection prevention ahead of HIV Research for Prevention Conference (HIVR4P). >> [More](#)

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