

COVID-19 and HIV: Weekly Digest

1 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 THE HIV RESPONSE

<p>South Africa's HIV Failures Cost More Than 300,000 Lives. This Painful Past Is Helping in COVID-19 Fight. 29 April 2020, CNN</p> <p>In South Africa, the COVID-19 response draws on the country's history with the HIV epidemic. The response includes a strict lockdown as well as around 35,000 government and PEPFAR supported health workers conducting screening in communities.</p>	<p>Sustained HIV and TB Care Good for COVID-19 Fight 30 April 2020, <i>New Frame</i></p> <p>As the pandemic grows in South Africa, experts are calling on the government to ensure tuberculosis (TB) and HIV screenings and treatment efforts are intensified. <i>See also: High Percentage of HIV-Positive People Skipping Treatment over COVID-19 Fears</i></p>
<p>COVID-19 Rapidly Reshaping HIV Services Around the World 27 April 2020, <i>Aidsmap</i></p> <p>Global experts speaking at International AIDS Society (IAS) webinars last week noted the challenges of HIV provision during the COVID-19 pandemic including the supply of antiretroviral therapy (ART) and needs of vulnerable populations. Another webinar discussion highlighted the impact of HIV clinic closures and the inequitable distribution of technology (MedPage Today).</p>	<p>UK Sexual Health Services Are Being Decimated by COVID-19 23 April 2020, <i>Aidsmap</i></p> <p>A survey conducted by the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) found that in-person services in the UK for people seeking HIV testing, treatment and PrEP as well as other sexual health services drastically shrunk since the beginning of the pandemic.</p>
<p>How COVID-19 Response Disrupted Health Services In Rural India 24 April 2020, <i>Mint</i></p> <p>Data from the Indian Ministry of Health suggest that the provision of health services declined in rural areas; among gaps in other services, HIV testing rates fell.</p>	<p>As Coronavirus Bears Down, Zimbabwe's HIV Crisis Worsens 26 April 2020, <i>Global Press Journal</i></p> <p>A report from Zimbabwe discusses fears of people living with HIV in the country. Existing gaps and challenges in HIV testing stand to be exacerbated by the pandemic.</p>

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS AND CHILDREN

Emerging reports of an inflammatory condition among children potentially related to SARS-CoV-2

On Sunday, doctors in the United Kingdom reported cases of children with abdominal pain, gastrointestinal symptoms and cardiac inflammation. This has been observed in children with confirmed Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) positive SARS-CoV-2 infection as well as children who are PCR negative. An alert issued by NHS England noted the "growing concern" on a coronavirus-related inflammatory syndrome in children and advised urgent treatment. The symptoms are similar to features of toxic shock syndrome and Kawasaki disease. *See:*

- [At least 12 UK children have needed intensive care due to illness linked to Covid-19](#) (*The Guardian*, 27 Apr)

Clinicians in northern Italy soon reported extraordinary numbers of young children under age 9 with severe cases of Kawasaki disease, which is more commonly seen in Asia. This week, paediatric cases of inflammatory symptoms have been reported from at least six countries. Experts are investigating possible links between the coronavirus and these symptoms. To note, this syndrome is rare and most children with COVID-19 have mild symptoms. *See:*

- [More cases of rare syndrome in children reported globally](#) (*The Guardian*, 29 Apr)
- [COVID-19 complication seen in children is 'rare', WHO says](#) (*Reuters*, 29 Apr)
- [Coronavirus & Kawasaki disease in children: It's an intriguing but unproven link](#) (*The Conversation*, 29 Apr)
- [Coronavirus: 'My son had symptoms of rare syndrome'](#) (*BBC*, 28 Apr)

Evidence on SARS-CoV-2 transmission among children is uncertain

Doctors are increasingly agreeing that children are less vulnerable to COVID-19, seeing fewer cases and hospitalizations due to the virus in this population. These data are a welcome sign for decision makers who are considering reopening schools as the first step in refreshing country economies. *See:*

- **Consensus is emerging that children are less vulnerable to coronavirus** (*The Wall Street Journal*, 27 Apr)
- **Children unlikely to transmit coronavirus, says study cited in push to reopen schools** (*The Guardian*, 26 Apr)

Meanwhile, a new paper ([preprint](#)) from the Institute of Virology at Charité in Germany reports no significant differences in SARS-CoV-2 viral loads between children and adults. The researchers noted that this means children may be as infectious as adults and advised caution in reopening schools. See:

- **New reports on virus in kids fuel uncertainty on schools** (*Bloomberg*, 30 Apr)

GLOBAL IMPACT OF COVID-19

Millions Had Risen Out of Poverty. Coronavirus Is Pulling Them Back 30 April 2020, <i>The New York Times</i>	ViiV Unveils £3m Fund to Study Impact of COVID19 on HIV Community 28 April 2020, <i>PharmaTimes</i>	Gates Foundation to Concentrate on Coronavirus 27 April 2020, <i>Financial Times</i>
In the wake of the pandemic, the world will see an increase in global poverty. The World Bank estimates that sub-Saharan Africa will see its first recession in 25 years and South Asia will likely experience its worst economic performance in 40 years.	ViiV Healthcare set up a new GBP£3 million fund to support research for COVID-19 and HIV as well as to support community-based activities that address specific challenges faced by people living with HIV.	The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will now focus primarily on the COVID-19 pandemic. "We've taken an organization that was focused on HIV and malaria and polio eradication, and almost entirely shifted it to work on this," Bill Gates stated. <i>See also: Axios and The Hill</i>

'Where are all our patients?': COVID phobia keeping people with serious heart symptoms away from ERs

24 April 2020, *STAT News*

There is growing concern about the downstream impacts of COVID-19. Clinicians fear that patients are dying at home to avoid risking exposure to SARS-CoV-2 in hospitals.

Niger Reports New Polio Outbreak

24 April 2020, *WHO Africa*

Two children were infected by polio in Niger, signaling a new outbreak. WHO and partners had earlier announced that polio vaccination activities were halted until at least June 1 due to COVID-19. *See also: [Associated Press](#)*

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Multiple results from trials on remdesivir

Early results of a [federal trial](#) with 1063 patients hospitalized with advanced COVID-19 suggested that treatment with remdesivir can shorten the time to recovery, which averaged 11 days among those who received treatment compared to 15 days with placebo.

Meanwhile, a randomized, placebo-controlled trial in China was inconclusive about the benefits of remdesivir. There was no significant difference in time to clinical improvement or mortality at 28 days among hospitalized patients with severe COVID-19 in the treatment group versus the control. The results were published in *The Lancet* along with a [commentary](#) on the challenges of underpowered studies.

Gilead Sciences issued a [press release](#) with results from a Phase III clinical trial comparing the efficacy of 5-day and 10-day treatment courses of remdesivir. Both treatment courses had a similar time to recovery; there were no reports of comparisons with a control group.

See:

- **U.S. Explores Emergency-Use Approval for Gilead Drug After Study Found It Helped Recovery from COVID-19** (*The Wall Street Journal*, 30 Apr)
- **Remdesivir Now 'Standard of Care' for COVID-19, Fauci Says** (*Medscape*, 29 Apr)

Global momentum on a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2

UK Researchers Should Know by July If Coronavirus Vaccine Is Effective

30 April 2020, *CNBC*

A vaccine from the Jenner Institute and the Oxford Vaccine Group entered phase one trials last week. AstraZeneca representatives noted that they expect to know more about efficacy by July. *See also: [BBC video](#)*

Trump's 'Operation Warp Speed' Aims to Rush Coronavirus Vaccine

29 April 2020, *Bloomberg*

The Trump administration is pulling together pharmaceutical companies, government agencies and the military to accelerate vaccine development with a goal of having 300 million doses of a vaccine by January.

US Stays Away as World Leaders Agree Action on COVID-19 Vaccine

24 April 2020, *The Guardian*

Global leaders with the WHO pledged to accelerate cooperation on COVID-19 vaccine development. The European Commission will host a [virtual summit](#) on May 4 to raise EUR€8 billion for the initiative.

Prime Minister Announces New Support For COVID-19 Medical Research and Vaccine Development

23 April 2020, *Office of the Prime Minister*

The Government of Canada announced more than CA\$1 billion for a COVID-19 medical research strategy.

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

The Fight against AIDS Has Shaped How Potential COVID-19 Drugs Will Reach Patients

29 April 2020, *The Washington Post*

The legacy of HIV/AIDS activism has shaped access to experimental drugs and allowed them to reach COVID-19

Three Lessons from Past Epidemics that Will Help India Fight COVID-19

29 April 2020, *The Wire*

India's Former Union Secretary of Health K. Sujatha Rao picks lessons from the HIV epidemic for the COVID-19 response: do not panic, ensure

Africa's COVID-19 Response Is a Glimpse of How Things Could Be Different

30 April 2020, *Financial Times*

Countries in Africa, in spite of budgetary constraints, have been well coordinated and effective. While

patients sooner, according to legal historian Marie-Amélie George.	equitable services and formulate policies based on evidence.	it is still early, there are lessons for others from Africa's COVID-19 response that builds on its experience with previous epidemics.
<p>HIV in the Era of COVID-19: Why experts are concerned about an increase in cases 29 April 2020, <i>ABC News</i></p> <p>The closure of free HIV clinics and needle exchange programmes that once helped lower HIV rates in the U.S. can hurt progress and reverse trends in HIV.</p>	<p>Low Coronavirus Testing in Africa Leads to Blind Spots: Africa CDC chief 30 April 2020, <i>Devex</i></p> <p>John Nkengasong, director of the Africa Center for Disease Control (CDC), warns that the low confirmed cases of the coronavirus in the region could be because the full impact is still hidden. The CDC will focus on scaling up testing.</p>	<p>The TB Epidemic Teaches Us the Battle against Covid-19 Won't Be Won in Hospitals Alone 30 April 2020, <i>The Guardian</i></p> <p>The key innovation of the global response to TB was a community-based approach. COVID-19 similarly needs community testing, building trust and providing support for the economic and social risks of the pandemic.</p>
<p>Limiting the Spread of COVID-19 in Africa: One size mitigation strategies do not fit all countries 28 April 2020, <i>Lancet Global Health</i></p> <p>Drawing on the experience of early imported COVID-19 cases in Africa, this commentary notes considerations for decision makers in implementing prevention and treatment approaches.</p>	<p>When Pandemics Collide 24 April 2020, <i>The Lancet</i></p> <p>This editorial draws on evidence published in the last month to suggest that HIV and COVID-19 are on a collision course. The potential impact of SARS-CoV-2 on people living with HIV and on health systems in settings with high HIV burdens is becoming a major concern.</p>	<p>The Time is Now: Expedited HIV differentiated service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic 23 April 2020, <i>Journal of the International AIDS Society</i></p> <p>This commentary urges accelerating access to differentiated service delivery (DSD) for people living with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic and presents considerations to do so.</p>

AROUND THE UNITED NATIONS

- The WHO announced the [Access to COVID-19 Tools \(ACT\) Accelerator](#), a new global collaboration that aims to speed global research and production efforts for critical COVID-19 drugs, tests, and vaccines. ([WHO](#))
- The new '[A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19](#)' sets out strategies to address the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN's socio-economic recovery efforts will be [led by UNDP](#).
- Greta Thunberg and non-governmental organization Human Act launched a child rights campaign to support UNICEF's efforts in the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes protecting children from food shortages, strained healthcare systems, violence and lost education. ([UNICEF](#) and [Reuters](#))
- According to [new data](#) from UNFPA, the number of women and girls who face violence, child marriages, unintended pregnancies and other harmful practice is set to skyrocket due to the pandemic. ([UN News](#))
- UNAIDS featured the work of associations of people living with HIV supporting HIV treatment adherence during the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan. ([UNAIDS](#))
- The Global Financing Facility (GFF) warned of a secondary global health crisis, especially in low- and lower-middle income countries, due to disruptions in access to health and nutrition services. ([GFF](#))

RECENT RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

<p>Antibody Responses To SARS-CoV-2 in Patients With COVID-19 29 April 2020, <i>Nature Medicine</i></p> <p>This study suggests people exposed to SARS-CoV-2 show an antibody response, supporting more serological testing. Researchers noted that all COVID-19 patients in the study tested positive for antiviral immunoglobulin-G (IgG) within 19 days of symptom onset.</p>	<p>Atypical Presentation Of COVID-19 in Young Infants 27 April 2020, <i>The Lancet</i></p> <p>In a new report from France about five infants (aged <3 months) with COVID-19, the authors noted neurologic symptoms at admission among four of them. They recommend that infants younger than 3 months with isolated fever be tested for SARS-CoV-2 and monitored.</p>
<p>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) Infection in Children and Adolescents: A systematic review 22 April 2020, <i>JAMA Pediatrics</i></p> <p>In this systematic review of 18 studies with 1065 participants, most children with SARS-CoV-2 infection presented with mild symptoms and recovered within one to two weeks. Symptomatic children generally only required supportive care.</p>	<p>Presenting Characteristics, Comorbidities, and Outcomes Among 5700 Patients Hospitalized With COVID-19 in the New York City Area 22 April 2020, <i>JAMA</i></p> <p>In this case series with 5700 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 in the New York City area, relatively few were living with HIV (0.8%). The most common comorbidities were hypertension, obesity and diabetes.</p>

Epidemiology and Transmission of COVID-19 in 391 Cases and 1286 of Their Close Contacts in Shenzhen, China: A retrospective cohort study
 27 April 2020, *Lancet Infectious Diseases*

With data from 391 SARS-CoV-2 cases and 1286 close contacts in China, the researchers estimated metrics of disease transmission. The secondary attack rate did not defer by age; children are at a similar risk of infection to the general population, although they are less likely to have severe symptoms.

Multicenter Initial Guidance on Use of Antivirals for Children with COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2

22 April 2020, *Journal of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society*

This panel suggests a decision-making framework for paediatric antiviral therapy for COVID-19 based on disease severity. While acknowledging that supportive care is generally adequate, the panel suggests remdesivir as the preferred agent when an antiviral is needed. This guidance should be updated as new evidence emerge.

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

Blog: Assessing the Needs of Young Key Populations During COVID-19 Outbreak In Asia and The Pacific <small>30 April 2020</small> This post shares preliminary findings of the survey by the Interagency Task Team on Young Key Populations (YKPs) in Asia and the Pacific.	Living Under Lockdown: Girls and COVID-19 <small>30 April 2020</small> A report by Plan International highlights the potential long-lasting consequences of abuse, neglect, fear and hunger for girls worldwide in the context of COVID-19.	Tweet: 8 Ways Governments Can Support Children Living with HIV During the Pandemic <small>30 April 2020</small> Social media graphics from UNICEF's HIV programme show how governments can support children living with HIV during the pandemic.
PEPFAR Technical Guidance in Context of COVID-19 Pandemic <small>UPDATED 29 April 2020</small> This week's updates can be found in the sections on telehealth, adolescents living with HIV, and faith and community organizations.	4 Ways HIV Programs Can Go Online to Mitigate COVID-19 Impact <small>29 April 2020</small> Experts from FHI360 spotlight digital response strategies that can be used to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on providing HIV services.	Interim Guidance for COVID-19 and Persons with HIV <small>UPDATED 21 April 2020</small> The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provided updated guidance for people living with HIV and their health care providers regarding COVID-19.
Interim Guidelines on the Provision of HIV Prevention and Care Services in the Context of the COVID-19 Outbreak in Tanzania The National AIDS Control Programme in Tanzania released guidelines for providers to continue HIV services during the pandemic.	Eswatini: Guidance on the provision of chronic care during the COVID-19 pandemic <small>22 April 2020</small> This memo from Eswatini's Director of Health Services to health facilities includes guidelines on continuing to provide HIV care and treatment.	The Oxford Union: Winnie Byanyima <small>PODCAST 27 April 2020</small> UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima spoke of the lessons we can learn from the HIV/AIDS pandemic in this podcast with the Oxford Union.
COVID-19 and Global Inequality <small>WEBINAR 28 April 2020</small> In this webinar from The New School and Health Policy Watch, global health leaders discussed how COVID-19 exposed inequalities in access to medical care, employment and countries' abilities to protect their citizens.	Updates on Policy and Practice Adaptations from Ministries of Health (Eswatini and Liberia) <small>WEBINAR 28 April 2020</small> The International Treatment Preparedness Coalition in collaboration, ICAP at Columbia University and the DSD Initiative hosted a discussion on policy changes and health system adaptations in Eswatini and Liberia.	Test, test, test: COVID-19 and HIV testing updates <small>WEBINAR 30 April 2020</small> This webinar from the International AIDS Society included discussions on global updates on COVID-19 testing, strategies for HIV testing and treatment and lessons learned from the pandemic thus far.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **5 May 2020:** The HIV Coverage, Quality, and Impact Network (CQUIN) is hosting a discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of family planning services. *8am ET / 2pm SAST* >> [More](#)
- **6 May 2020:** The International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC) is hosting a virtual pre-conference for Adherence 2020 on continuity of HIV care during COVID-19. *12pm ET / 6pm SAST* >> [More](#)

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