



Averting a Dual Disaster in Africa: Protecting Essential Health Services during COVID-19

(Webinar, June 3, 2020)

Additional Resources

RELEVANT RESOURCES:

- [The potential effects of widespread community transmission of SARS-CoV-2 infection in the World Health Organization African Region: a predictive model](#)
- [Maintaining essential health services: operational guidance for the COVID-19 context](#)
- [Rapid assessment of service delivery for NCDs during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS NOT ADDRESSED DURING THE WEBINAR Q&A:

In light of weak health systems in Africa, and the reality that indeed testing levels for COVID-19 are sub-optimal: Are there estimates of the "degree/levels" of under-reporting in Africa (or for any country in Africa) compared to nations with highest abilities to carry out COVID-19 testing?

- *Answer (Richard Lessells): It's quite difficult to know how much under-reporting there is. The standard way to consider this is to estimate the number of cases you expect based on the reported deaths and the estimated case fatality rate. But the problem there is obviously that if you also have under-reporting of Covid-19 deaths then it will clearly affect these estimates. The site I follow for this is at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine mathematical modelling group (https://cmmid.github.io/topics/covid19/global_cfr_estimates.html).*

You can see a series of graphs, including a few countries in Africa, and the estimated proportion of symptomatic cases that are being reported. You can see the 95% confidence intervals are quite wide for many of the African countries. So, for example, South Africa sits at 30-50%, Senegal at 60-100%, Nigeria at 30-60%, Ghana at 90-100%.

What is your view about the benefits to the continuity of essential health services of designating health facilities as COVID and non-COVID facilities?

- *Answer (Richard Lessells): I personally think this can only be a short-term measure, as we are going to be dealing with this virus for the long-term and so we have to ensure that our whole health system is capacitated to maintain services and to manage Covid and non-Covid cases throughout this pandemic.*



What is the overall progression of the pandemic in Africa, and what can we expect in the coming months with the lightening of the restriction measures?

- *Answer (Richard Lessells): This is a great question, and essentially we don't know the answer! We need to follow what is happening in different countries and assimilate data to understand what is working and what is not working as we ease the lockdowns across the continent.*

Looking at the spike in Western Cape [South Africa], what could be the reason why? It is not the case in other highly populated areas such as Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. What could have gone wrong there? What strategies were used to increase visits to HIV clinics in KwaZulu-Natal during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- *Answer (Richard Lessells): In South Africa, we are still seeing a heavily clustered epidemic in most provinces. Clusters occurred in places where people were still congregating during the lockdown (health care facilities, prisons, large factories, other workplaces). In Western Cape these clusters spilled over into the high population density areas, especially the urban townships, and this led to much more widespread community transmission. We are not sure whether the same will now happen in the other provinces in the next few weeks. As you say, there are other areas with similarly high population density in other provinces but we are not sure whether there are other things about the social networks, behavior, transport utilization patterns, or colder temperatures, for example, that have facilitated the spread in Western Cape.*

What impact did the lockdown have on malaria diagnosis?

- *Answer (Richard Lessells): There is not much malaria in South Africa (we have about 10 000 cases per year in pockets of northern KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo). We would have been nearing end of malaria risk season as Covid-19 was really taking off so I suspect it might not have had a big impact, but I haven't seen any data.*