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## ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

### **Patient-level interventions to reduce alcohol-related harms in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and meta-summary**

*Plos Medicine* | 12 April 2022

*Catherine Staton, João Vissoci, Deena El-Gabri, Konyinsope Adewumi, Tessa Concepcion, et al.*

Alcohol use is an important cause of chronic disease and injury. It is one of the top 5 risk factors for death and disability in the world. The detrimental effects of alcohol use contribute to 3.3 million deaths and 139 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost globally each year. Alcohol use has also been associated with risky behaviors, including crime, aggressive driving, interpersonal violence, and self-inflicted injury. Such behaviors not only have harmful effects on the individual but also on the greater population. Compared to high-income countries, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) report higher rates of risky drinking behaviors, such as binge drinking and episodic drinking, as well as an earlier onset of alcohol consumption.

### **Cascade Immune Mechanisms of Protection against Mycobacterium tuberculosis (IMPac-TB): study protocol for the Household Contact Study in the Western Cape, South Africa**

*Springer Link* | 15 April 2022

*Andriëtte Hiemstra, Candice McDonald, Ilana van Rensburg, Kim Standley, Elizna Maasdorp, et al.*

Natural immunity against Mycobacterium tuberculosis exists, and > 90% of those infected remain disease-free. Innate and adaptive immune responses required to mediate such protection against tuberculosis (TB) are, however, poorly understood. This is an analytical study exploring protective and non-protective pathways of immunity against Mycobacterium tuberculosis. Adults without HIV infection are recruited at community healthcare clinics in high TB incidence areas of the Western Cape Province, South Africa. Data regarding participants' medical, social and medication usage will be collected, and clinical examinations and point-of-care tests documented. Reference tests for TB (chest radiographs and sputum tests for GeneXpert MTB/RIF Ultra®, Auramine smear and liquid cultures) and investigations to classify infection states [interferon-gamma release assay (IGRA) and SARS-CoV-2 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) nasopharyngeal swab and IgG], are done on all participants who meet the inclusion criteria. 18F-Fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography combined with computerized tomography will be done on all close contacts (contacts) and healthy control (controls) participants.

## **Enablers and barriers to effective parenting within the first 1000 days: an exploratory study of South African parents and primary caregivers in low socio-economic communities**

*BMC Public Health | 20 April 2022*

The first 1000 days is the period between conception and a child's second birthday. It is the critical period for disease prevention and the fundamental window of opportunity for a child's development. These first 1000 days are especially crucial for the most active period of neurological childhood brain development. Children's experiences in the first 1000 days of life have major effects on child development and well-being. Studies have shown that a child with early and typical physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development has better health and educational outcomes in childhood, and later in life, as well as employment outcomes in adulthood. This indicates that development during the first 1000 days of life significantly contributes to the life trajectory of individuals. Poor maternal newborn and child health (MNCH) is considered a global public health burden. In 2019, it was estimated that 5.2 million children younger than five years die from mostly preventable or treatable causes.

## **'It feels like my visibility matters': Women ageing with HIV overcoming the 'violence of invisibility' through community, advocacy and the radical act of care for others**

*Sage Women's Health | 22 April 2022*

*Jacqui Stevenson*

Women living with and ageing with HIV face intersecting stigma and discrimination, on the basis of HIV, age, gender and, for many women, race, ethnicity and immigration status.<sup>1</sup> The experience of growing older with a stigmatized condition, in an ageist, sexist, and racist society, impacts women's experiences in significant, overlapping, and reinforcing ways. To claim, publicly and proudly, ownership of a stigmatized identity and belonging to a stigmatized group, is a radical act of refusal and self-care, that was replicated in different ways in the stories shared by women living with HIV in a study conducted in London between 2015 and 2019. In this participatory, feminist-oriented study, women aged over 50 living with HIV described the intention, and value behind their visibility as women living with HIV, whether as activists in national media, in peer support groups or in personal relationships. Regardless of the stage upon which their visibility was set, there was a clear shared sense that visibility had value, for themselves and for others.

## **Clinical characteristics with inflammation profiling of long COVID and association with 1-year recovery following hospitalisation in the UK: a prospective observational study**

*The Lancet | 23 April 2022*

*The PHOSP-COVID Collaborative Group*

As of April, 2022, more than 500 million cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection have been reported worldwide,<sup>1</sup> with 21.7 million cases in the UK<sup>2</sup> and over 820 000 patients in the UK admitted to hospital for COVID-19. This population is at high risk of persisting health impairments 6 months after discharge associated with reduced physical function and health-related quality of life. It is essential to understand both the longer-term trajectory of recovery to identify ongoing health-care needs and the required response by health-care systems and policy makers for this already large and ever-increasing population. Much remains unknown about the longer-term sequelae of COVID-19. In the largest cohort study to date from Wuhan, China, nearly half of patients had persistent symptoms 12 months after discharge from hospital for COVID-19. 6–12 months after discharge, patients had no change in 6-min walk distance, but had some improvement in the results of pulmonary imaging.

## **“After 25 years of democracy we are still stigmatized and discriminated against...”: Health care experiences of HIV positive older black gay men in a township in South Africa**

*The Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning | 24 April 2022*

*Thembelani Mange, Neil Henderson, Nomvuyo Lukelelo*

Older gay black men living with HIV and AIDS have been and continue to be an invisible part of the research landscape in South Africa, with the focus being on the younger LGBTQI+ cohort. Furthermore, aging and health care concerns of this population are 'swept under the carpet' due to stigmatization and homophobia. This qualitative study explored the aging and health-care experiences of older gay black

men in a selected township in the Cape Metropole, with the purpose of finding strategies to deal with their real life concerns. The first author utilized in-depth interviews with 15 participants, 10 of which were a sample of self-identified gay men, aged between 43-77 and drawn from a selected township in the Cape Metropole in South Africa. Five health professionals working at the local clinic were also interviewed. Interviews were audio-recorded in the language of the participants (isiXhosa) and transcribed verbatim. They were then translated from isiXhosa to English before a thematic analysis was undertaken. One of the key findings of the study was that health-care professionals, particularly nurses at a local clinic, are stigmatizing older black men who are living with HIV and AIDS. This is exacerbated by the rejection by their families and the death of their life partners which leads to isolation, loneliness and depression. Due to comorbidities, COVID-19 has led to some participants passing away. Training of health-care professionals should be prioritized by social workers and workshops should be held in the township to educate families of older LGBTQI+ people on their aging concerns.

### **Utilisation of cervical cancer screening among women living with HIV at Kenya's national referral hospital**

*South African Journal of HIV Medicine | 25 April 2022*

*James Kangethe, Aliza Monroe-Wise, Peter Muiruri, Jamer Komu, Kenneth Mutai, et al.*

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). In Kenya, over 5000 new cervical cancer cases occur annually resulting in over 3000 deaths. Over half of Kenyan women living with HIV (WLHIV) are infected with a high-risk human papillomavirus (HR-HPV) genotype which contributes to higher cervical cancer incidence and mortality among Kenyan WLHIV. The Kenyan HIV prevalence among women of reproductive age is 6.2%. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends integrating cervical cancer prevention services at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels within HIV care programmes. This includes the provision of HPV vaccination to eligible adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) combined with health education on risk factors for cervical cancer, and regular screening for early detection among at risk women, and treatment with surgery, cryotherapy, radiotherapy, or chemotherapy, when necessary.

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## **RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS**

### **Booster vaccine hesitancy: South Africans dragging their heels**

*Health-e News | 20 April 2022*

As a possible fifth COVID-19 wave looms, a report has revealed that booster vaccine hesitancy is at a high among South Africans, placing the country's uptake at a crossroads. The SA Covid and Vaccine Social Listening Report is published weekly and covers vaccine sentiment, rumours and misinformation in South Africa. According to the latest report, people living in the Buffalo City Metro in the Eastern Cape are tired of hearing about vaccines. Meanwhile, those living in OR Tambo, want to get vaccinated but many don't have access to a clinic.

### **Over 1 million African children protected by first malaria vaccine**

*WHO | 21 April 2022*

As World Malaria Day approaches, more than 1 million children in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi have received one or more doses of the world's first malaria vaccine, thanks to a pilot programme coordinated by WHO. The malaria vaccine pilots, first launched by the Government of Malawi in April 2019, have shown that the RTS,S/AS01 (RTS,S) vaccine is safe and feasible to deliver, and that it substantially reduces deadly severe malaria. These findings paved the way for the historic October 2021 WHO recommendation for the expanded use of RTS,S among children living in settings with moderate to high malaria transmission. If widely deployed, WHO estimates that the vaccine could save the lives of an additional 40 000 to 80 000 African children each year.

### **WHO recommends highly successful COVID-19 therapy and calls for wide geographical distribution and transparency from originator**

*WHO | 22 April 2022*

Today, WHO made a strong recommendation for nirmatrelvir and ritonavir, sold under the name Paxlovid, for mild and moderate COVID-19 patients at highest risk of hospital admission, calling it the best

therapeutic choice for high-risk patients to date. However, availability, lack of price transparency in bilateral deals made by the producer, and the need for prompt and accurate testing before administering it, are turning this life-saving medicine into a major challenge for low- and middle-income countries. Pfizer's oral antiviral drug (a combination of nirmatrelvir and ritonavir tablets) is strongly recommended for patients with non-severe COVID-19 who are at highest risk of developing severe disease and hospitalization, such as unvaccinated, older, or immunosuppressed patients.

## **State of SA Hospitals: Are we ready for government's ambitious National Health Insurance?**

*IOL | 22 April 2022*

Despite the setbacks of the Covid-19 pandemic, South Africa will forge ahead with the rollout of the National Health Insurance said Foster Mohale, the national spokesman for the Department of Health. "Parliament has opted for virtual public hearings few months ago to process the bill," said Mohale. He said the implementation of the NHI will ensure that all people - poor, rich young and old, would have equal access to quality, accessible and affordable healthcare services.

## **Supporting HIV services for flood survivors in KwaZulu-Natal**

*UNAIDS | 23 April 2022*

Since floods killed 440 people and left many thousands more homeless last week in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa, UNAIDS has been working with communities, civil society and government leaders to respond. Together with the UN system in South Africa, donors and other partners, UNAIDS has been urgently evaluating the needs of thousands of people living with HIV who were directly impacted by the flash flooding. Swollen rivers and landslides damaged more than 600 schools and 66 health care facilities, while many homes have been left without running water or electricity. The government health facilities that can operate, say that they are being overwhelmed, with their staff – themselves affected by the flooding - being further stretched by the scale of demand for health services. "It is a very tense and stressful time for everyone," said Miriam Chipimo, UNAIDS Fast-Track Adviser based in KZN. "Major roads are damaged or flooded, food supplies are disrupted. People are struggling for electricity, water and shelter while worrying about security. Some are having to dig through the mud, looking for friends and family members on their own."

## **Chronically ill patients fear for their lives**

*City Press | 24 April 2022*

Scores of patients from areas affected by the recent devastating floods in KwaZulu-Natal have been left in limbo as they cannot get their chronic medication. Some patients told City Press this week that they were turned away from local clinics because there was no medication to dispense. 36-year-old man from Mtubatuba, a small town north of Richards Bay, who is being treated for HIV, said he took the last of his tablets on Friday last week. "On Wednesday, I decided to go to the Nkundusi clinic in the Qakwini Reserve as I felt it was safe for me to travel. When I arrived at the clinic, there were already a number of patients there, including mothers with babies, to get their medication.

## **Expert sounds alarm on fifth wave after Covid-19 curve turns upwards in SA**

*Daily Maverick | 24 April 2022*

Early indications, including a rise in test positivity rates and the presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the country's wastewater, are sounding the alarms for the arrival of a possible fifth, winter wave in South Africa. It is not clear yet whether the currently dominating Omicron variant BA2 is being replaced by a different subvariant, the head of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), Professor Adrian Puren, said on Thursday. Two subvariants, BA.4 and BA.5, are being tracked by the World Health Organization, as more cases of these have been found in countries other than South Africa. Looking at the case numbers, it appears they are increasing rapidly, with a rise in the number of positive tests in the country.

## **5 healthy habits you must follow if diabetes runs in your family**

*Times Now | 24 April 2022*

Diabetes is largely a lifestyle disorder that is not always inherited, yet family history can still increase the disease risk of an individual. Diabetes is a chronic condition characterised by abnormally high blood sugar levels that could over time contribute to the possibility of heart diseases, obesity, blindness, diabetic foot,

or even the need for limb amputation. In such a scenario, what must one do to mitigate diabetes risk if the condition runs in the family? We have an answer, the following healthy habits could help.

## **Malaria on the rise — combating and eliminating it is a complex and ever-changing battle**

*Daily Maverick | 24 April 2022*

The battle to eliminate malaria has been ongoing for decades, despite the advances and gains made in reducing the global malaria burden between 2000 and 2015. There were an estimated 241 million malaria cases with 627,000 malaria-related deaths worldwide in 2020. That is about 14 million more cases and 69,000 more deaths than in 2019. Recently, progress has reversed, with a slow incline in cases and deaths being noted. New approaches are needed if we are ever to achieve the 2030 targets of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Technical Strategy for Malaria — global reduction of 90% in case incidence and mortality, and elimination in at least 35 countries. The WHO theme for World Malaria Day 2022 on 25 April is “Harness innovation to reduce the malaria disease burden and save lives.”

## **Working towards a malaria-free world**

*UN News | 24 April 2022*

Noting that the day is marked annually on 25 April to focus global attention on the mosquito-borne infectious disease, and its devastating impact, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa Dr. Moeti said that this year aligns with her call to urgently scale up innovation and deploy new tools to battle malaria, while also advocating for equitable access to prevention and treatment – within the context of building health system resilience. “While this is a ground-breaking advance in the development of new tools to fight this disease, with the potential to save millions of lives, supplies are currently limited”, she said. As such, it is important to ensure that available doses are being used for maximum impact, while continuing to be accessible to those most at risk.

## **World Malaria Day: 2020 saw disease worsen during the Covid-19 pandemic**

*Daily Maverick | 24 April 2022*

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people, mostly children living in Africa, succumb to malaria, an age-old mosquito-borne scourge. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 627,000 people died in 2020, an increase of 12 per cent from 2019, mainly due to “disturbances” in access to care linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. Before 2020, steady progress on the transmission and treatment of malaria had been made, mostly through the use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets, testing and effective drugs. World Malaria Day was established in May 2007 to provide “education and understanding of malaria” and is commemorated every year on 25 April to recognise global efforts to control malaria.

## **Malaria elimination: South Africa needs to regroup and refocus to get there**

*The Conversation | 24 April 2022*

In recent years South Africa has made significant progress in its effort to eliminate malaria. The World Health Organization (WHO) lists it as one of the countries that has the potential to eliminate the disease in the near future. In 2021, the WHO also hailed South Africa for bucking a grim trend. It was one of the few malaria-endemic countries in Africa that did not see a major upsurge in malaria cases caused by COVID-related disruptions. But it's not all good news. For the second time in a decade, South Africa is set to miss its malaria elimination target. The country had committed to ending malaria by 2018, but this did not happen. In 2019, the government set a goal to end malaria by 2023. Despite implementing a number of new interventions which have reduced the country's malaria burden, South Africa failed to halt the transmission of malaria within its borders.

## **Fresh signs of mosquito insecticide resistance in South Africa**

*The Conversation | 24 April 2022*

Most South Africans aren't worried about malaria even though the disease is endemic in the country. Four of the country's nine provinces carry malaria risk while 10% of the population is at risk of contracting malaria. The lack of concern can be attributed to the fact that the country has a relatively low burden of the disease. In 2020, South Africa had 8,126 cases and 38 deaths. This is low when compared to the estimated 10,007,802 cases and 23,766 deaths in Mozambique during the same period. The low number of cases means that South Africa is a candidate for malaria elimination. To reach this goal the country would need to record no new infections for three years. This goal has recently been achieved by China

and El Salvador in 2021, and Argentina and Algeria in 2019. The region in South Africa most likely to achieve this status is KwaZulu-Natal where the incidence rate is very low. But there are threats to achieving the goal.

### **Sexual abuse: Why young males are often invisible victims**

*Health-e News | 25 April 2022*

Young boys and men, who are victims of sexual abuse, choose to rather suffer in silence than seek help or speak up. The fear of being ridiculed or labelled 'weak' is a step too far for them and they often face the trauma alone. According to Dr Shaheda Omar, Director of Clinical Services at The Teddy Bear Clinic (TTBC), many factors continue to hinder young boys from seeking help. "Traditions and culture minimise the impact of sexual abuse and sexual assault on the boy child. When a disclosure is made, the blame is shifted and the boy victim is either accused of lying or in some way being responsible for the crime. Male victims must also often confront unsympathetic attitudes, especially if they choose to report the crime. They may also lack support from family and friends," said Omar.

### **Pregnant women with COVID-19 face greater risk of hospitalisation and ICU admission, strengthening case for vaccination**

*EurekAlert! | 25 April 2022*

New research to be presented at this year's European Congress of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases (ECCMID) in Lisbon, Portugal (23-26 April), suggests that pregnant women are at markedly greater risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19 than non-pregnant women of child-bearing age. The findings are independent of key risk factors including age, underlying illnesses, vaccination status, and infecting variant. Importantly, the findings also indicate that women were half as likely to be hospitalised after just one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and even less likely with two or more doses. Similarly, women were more than half as likely to be admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) when they had one dose of the vaccine, and even less likely with two or more doses.

### **South Africa facing Covid wave test in coming weeks**

*BusinessTech | 25 April 2022*

The resurgence of Covid cases in South Africa and signs of a possible fifth wave of infections will test South Africa's government and the country's new pandemic restrictions, says Business Leadership South Africa chief executive Busi Mavuso. Writing in her weekly open letter, Mavuso noted South Africa is currently in 30 day transition period from the state of disaster Covid regulations that were ended on 5 April before new National Health Act regulations became the way of managing responses to the pandemic. "This fifth wave will be the first test of these regulations, and I hope that they will prove more effective than their predecessors in balancing the need to restrict the transmission of the virus with the need to have minimal disruption of the economy and our lives," she said.

### **Link between Epstein-Barr virus and multiple sclerosis is a crucial discovery for people living with MS**

*Devdiscourse | 25 April 2022*

Canada has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis (MS) in the world, with 250 out of every 100,000 people affected. MS is an autoimmune disease in which elements of the immune system that are designed to protect us — white blood cells and antibodies — instead begin to damage the brain and spinal cord. This causes acute attacks — also known as relapses — of neurologic dysfunction such as visual loss, trouble walking or urinary and sexual dysfunction. Environmental trigger But what causes MS? The answer is complex. MS is caused by a combination of factors including genetic susceptibility to the disease (being born with genes that cause MS), an abnormal immune system that attacks instead of protects and an environmental trigger. In a study published in the journal Science, researchers found that Epstein Barr virus (EBV) — the virus that causes mononucleosis — is also an environmental trigger for MS.

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## **TRAINING AND RESOURCES**

**Subscribe to the Health Systems Trust Bulletin**

The Health Systems Trust (HST) produces a weekly bulletin on Fridays focusing on key public health news, peer-reviewed journal articles and other important primary healthcare resources.

### **Subscribe to the Health Systems Trust 60percent**

HST produces a weekly online publication, 60percent, which keeps subscribers abreast with the latest news and developments pertaining to HIV-related maternal, adolescent, child and youth health. The name 60percent signifies that southern Africa is responding to a feminised HIV/AIDS epidemic, with at least 60% of those living with HIV being women.

Subscribe to 60percent by simply visiting HST's website (<https://www.hst.org.za>), scroll to the bottom of the page, hit the SUBSCRIBE button, and follow the prompts. Let's keep you posted!

### **HSTi offers accredited and non-accredited short courses and full programmes**

The Health Systems Training Institute (HSTi) is the training arm of the Health Systems Trust (HST), a leading force in the South African public health sector. HST was established in 1992, on the brink of democracy in South Africa, and has since played a significant role in strengthening the national primary health system through health research, informatics, clinical support, capacity-building and training.

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## **PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS**

### **South African Health Review 2021**

*Health Systems Trust | 2021*

When it comes to service delivery and access in both the public and private health sectors, COVID-19 has put everything to the test. It has demonstrated how central public health security is to health and livelihoods, and how pandemic health emergencies expose the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of health systems, costing lives and causing immeasurable damage to economies. Few could have imagined the impact of COVID-19 when this pandemic reached our shores in March 2020.

This edition considers the government's and broader health sector's response to COVID-19, explores the current challenges facing the health system at this unprecedented time, and reflects on lessons learnt for future for public health emergencies. The chapters offer information on, inter alia, the challenges of balancing lives with livelihoods, and the impact of COVID-19 on different cadres of healthcare workers, especially Community Health Workers who found themselves at the forefront of our COVID-19 response. Other areas covered include the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations like children, persons with disabilities, farmworkers, migrants, and the poorest in our society.

### **WASH FIT: A practical guide for improving quality of care through water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities. Second edition**

*The WHO | 25 April 2022*

WASH FIT is a risk-based, quality improvement tool for health care facilities, covering key aspects of WASH services: water; sanitation; hand hygiene; environmental cleaning; health care waste management; and selected aspects of energy, building and facility management.

The first edition of WASH FIT was published in 2018 and as of 2022 is in use in over 40 countries. This second edition responds to member state and user requests for more guidance and information on incorporating climate and environment and gender and equity considerations throughout each of the 5 WASH FIT steps as well as a greater focus on sustainable, implementation and engagement with health actors.

The approach and WASH standards are the same as those included in the first edition of WASH FIT and thus those already implementing WASH FIT can use the new package to improve existing efforts. The Second Edition also includes a set of fact sheets, check lists, updated assessments and examples of national adoption and use of WASH FIT. The guide is accompanied by a comprehensive training manual and set of training slides.

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## CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### World Conference on Lung Health 2022

Date: 8 – 11 November 2022

Do you work in TB, COVID-19, air pollution, asthma, tobacco control or anything to do with lung health? Join us for the world's most sought-after event in the lung health calendar every year.

### Registration for the 2022 EIS Conference is open!

Date: 2-5 May 2022

The annual EIS conference is the nation's flagship applied epidemiology conference where EIS officers share their work in leading-edge investigations, scientific findings, and forward-thinking strategies to inform improvements in public health—all while gaining valuable presentation experience. EIS officers engage in professional networking sessions, recognition ceremonies and various learning opportunities. Free and open to the public, this conference draws a diverse attention each year from various public health sectors around the world—from epidemiology and laboratory science sleuths and public health organizations to EIS alumni, news media, and prospective applicants. Select sessions may be recorded and offered online in the months following the event.

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## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

There are currently no vacancies available. Please keep our eyes on HST's careers portal (<https://www.hst.org.za/Pages/Careers.aspx>) for all new job opportunities that may arise.

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