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ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Misconceptions about weather and seasonality must not misguide COVID-19 response

Nature Communications | 27 August 2020

Colin J. Carlson, Ana C. R. Gomez, Shweta Bansal & Sadie J. Ryan

Weather may marginally affect COVID-19 dynamics, but misconceptions about the way that climate and weather drive exposure and transmission have adversely shaped risk perceptions for both policymakers and citizens. Future scientific work on this politically-fraught topic needs a more careful approach. The researchers highlight that the burden of correcting misconceptions, and realigning policy, will probably fall on science communicators. They say it is urgent that public health guidance reiterate the best available scientific consensus: they recommend messaging focus on three key points, which synthesize most of the available evidence. If science communicators and public health authorities reiterate these points, they could minimize future underestimation of risk.

Association of Vitamin D status and other clinical characteristics with COVID-19 test results

JAMA Network | 3 September 2020

David Meltzer, Thomas Best, Hui Zhang, et al

Vitamin D treatment has been found to decrease the incidence of viral respiratory tract infection, especially in patients with vitamin D deficiency. Whether vitamin D is associated with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) incidence is unknown. The objectives **was to** examine whether the last vitamin D status before COVID-19 testing is associated with COVID-19 test results. This retrospective cohort study at an urban academic medical center included patients with a 25-hydroxycholecalciferol or 1, 25-dihydroxycholecalciferol level measured within 1 year before being tested for COVID-19 from March 3 to April 10, 2020.

Developing a COVID-19 mortality risk prediction model when individual-level data are not available

Nature Communications | 7 September 2020

Noam Barda, Dan Riesel, Amichay Akriv, Joseph Levy, Uriah Finkel, et al.

At the COVID-19 pandemic onset, when individual-level data of COVID-19 patients were not yet available, there was already a need for risk predictors to support prevention and treatment decisions. Here, the research report a hybrid strategy to create such a predictor, combining the development of a baseline severe respiratory infection risk predictor and a post-processing method to calibrate the predictions to reported COVID-19 case-fatality rates. With the accumulation of a COVID-19 patient cohort, this predictor is validated to have good discrimination (area under the receiver-operating characteristics curve of 0.943) and calibration (markedly improved compared to that of the baseline predictor). At a 5% risk threshold, 15% of patients are marked as high-risk, achieving a sensitivity of 88%. The study demonstrates that even at the onset of a pandemic, shrouded in epidemiologic fog of war, it is possible to provide a useful risk predictor, now widely used in a large healthcare organization.

Projected health-care resource needs for an effective response to COVID-19 in 73 low-income and middle-income countries: a modelling study

The Lancet Global Health | 9 September 2020

Tessa Tan-Torres Edejer, Odd Hanssen, Andrew Mirelman, Paul Verboom and Glenn Lolong, et al

Since WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, more than 20 million cases have been reported, as of Aug 24, 2020. This study aimed to identify what the additional health-care costs of a strategic preparedness and response plan (SPRP) would be if current transmission levels are maintained in a status quo scenario, or under scenarios where transmission is increased or decreased by 50%.

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

Oxford Academic: Clinical Infectious Diseases | 9 September 2020

Dima Dandachi, Grant Geiger, Mary Montgomery, Savannah Karmen-Tuohy and Mojgan Golzy, et al

People with HIV (PWH) may have numerous risk factors for acquiring Coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) and developing severe outcomes, but current data are conflicting. Healthcare providers enrolled consecutively by non-random sampling PWH with lab-confirmed COVID-19, diagnosed at their facilities between April 1st and July 1st, 2020. De-identified data were entered into an electronic Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap). The primary endpoint was severe outcome, defined as a composite endpoint of intensive care unit (ICU) admission, mechanical ventilation, or death. The secondary outcome was the need for hospitalization.

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RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

Countries Are Falling Behind In Tackling Non-Communicable Diseases, But 2030 Targets Are Still Within Reach

Health Policy Watch | 4 September 2020

Most countries in the world are not on track to reduce premature deaths from non-communicable diseases (NCD) by a third by 2030, according to a new NCD 2030 Countdown report published by The Lancet. “An estimated 150 million people will lose their lives too early from a noncommunicable disease over the next decade and right now NCDs are intensifying the impact of COVID-19,” said Bente Mikkelsen, director of NCDs at the World Health Organization in a press release. But it’s not too late to turn the tide, says Geneva-based NCD Alliance, a partner in the NCD Countdown Consortium that authored the report. Imperial College London and the World Health Organization are also a part of the Consortium. “The positive message from the study is that all countries still have options to reach SDG3.4 (the NCD target) by 2030 and in doing so save millions of lives,” Nina Renshaw, director of Policy & Advocacy at the NCD Alliance told Health Policy Watch.

Lockdown has worsened depression and could contribute to suicidal thoughts says mental health group

Health-e News | 4 September 2020

Nearly two-thirds of South Africans surveyed said their mental health worsened during lockdown, while some said they experienced suicidal thoughts. About 65% of people had heightened stress challenges during the first few weeks of lockdown in South Africa, according to a survey conducted by the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG). The mental health organisation surveyed 1,214 South Africans about their state of mental health during the first few weeks of the lockdown. Of the participants, about 12% of them said that they were feeling suicidal. Even before lockdown, South Africa has about 23 people dying by suicide and 230 serious attempts a day, according to SADAG. Now the Covid-19 pandemic and the effects of lockdown may have worsened rates of depression and suicide. "We need to understand that suicide does not happen out of the blue. There's a series of events and most of the time suicide is deeply entrenched in depression. It becomes action as a result of one having being depressed. For the longest time, that person at the end of the day does not see hope," says clinical psychologist Anele Siswana.

Clean Air For All: Towards A Global Community Of Action

Health Policy Watch | 8 September 2020

September 7 was the first International Day of Clean Air for blue skies launched by the United Nations' General Assembly. It aims to build a global community of action that calls on countries to work together to tackle air pollution and provide clean air for all. As the COVID-19 lockdowns reminded us of from Wuhan to Los Angeles to New Delhi, air pollution does not have to lead to fatality, and can drop dramatically when sources of emissions cease as a result of political decisions. In many places around the world, people rediscovered for the first time in decades what clean air looks like. In his keynote address, the secretary-general of the United Nations António Guterres urges, "We need dramatic and systemic change. Reinforced environmental standards, policies and laws that prevent emissions of air pollutants are needed more than ever.

Mayo Clinic Q and A: Preparing children for back to school

Health Policy Watch | 8 September 2020

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I have two children, ages 6 and 12. Our family has been wrestling with what to do in terms of sending our children back to school as our local school district has given us several options that include in-person and online learning. Do you have any advice for how we can make the best choice and any extra safety measures we can take if they return to school in-person? **ANSWER:** Going back to school this year has taken on new meaning and a new set of worries for parents. Schools must balance the educational, social and emotional needs of their students along with the health and safety of students and staff in the midst of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic...(continues)

Congratulations to Dr Andy Gray, an active member of the editorial board for HST's South African Health Review

Andy was recently named one of three winners of the Helen-Clark-JoPPP Award in 2020 by the Journal of Pharmaceutical Policy and Practice based on the scientific merit of their work, as well as the impact of their work on patients, decisions makers and on governments.

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TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Webinar 8: Health in the anthropocene: health promotion 2.0 and healthy cities 2.0

Date and time: 9 October 2019 | 5:00 pm | Geneva time (GMT + 1)

Speaker: Dr Trevor Hancock, Retired Professor and Senior Scholar of Public Health and Social Policy, University of Victoria, Canada

Webinar link: <https://who.webex.com>, Meeting number: 929 991 025

Overview: It is becoming increasingly clear that the Earth's natural systems are under threat from human

activity, and this threatens the health of the human population of the Earth (not to mention that of a myriad of other species). We are seeing not only climate change but declines in the populations of many species, widespread pollution and ecotoxicity, ocean acidification and depletion of such key resources as freshwater, forests, fisheries and farmlands. Responding to this situation has to be a priority for those working in health promotion. In this webinar, Dr Hancock will first describe the three aspects of the Anthropocene (geological, ecological and socio-cultural) and the implications for health. He will then discuss the role of health promotion in addressing the Anthropocene as an issue of socio-cultural transformation (Health Promotion 2.0), with particular attention to the concept of a One Planet City/Region (Healthy Cities 2.0).

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PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

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

UNAIDS | 9 September 2020

This new report by UNAIDS examines how the experience of tackling HIV can help inform and guide effective, efficient, people-centred and sustainable COVID-19 responses. Please click on the link below to download the publication.

The Rockefeller Foundation and ACCESS Health International Launch a Report Uncovering the Role of Digital Technology in Tackling Covid-19

Health Policy Watch | 9 September 2020

The Rockefeller Foundation and ACCESS Health International has launched a new report on the important role digital technology can play in response to pandemics like Covid-19. The report, titled Tackling Covid-19 Pandemic through Integrating Digital Technology and Public Health: Linking Experiences in China to the World, offers governments and business leaders around the world key insights from China’s experiences in tackling Covid-19, with the aim of further enabling effective responses against the virus. With support from The Rockefeller Foundation, ACCESS Health International conducted a systematic study, documenting and sharing both policy initiatives and technology solutions used to support the public health system in China throughout the pandemic. To download the report, please visit: <https://accessh.org/books/tackling-covid-19-pandemic-through-integrating-digital-technology-and-public-health-linking-experiences-in-china-to-the-world/>

The South African Health Review (SAHR) 2021 Call for Abstracts is now open!

Health Systems Trust | Closing date: 31 October 2020

Prospective authors are invited to submit abstracts that examine health-sector responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from the perspectives of strengthening health systems; leadership and governance; resource allocation and financing; service delivery, human resources, and medical equipment and supplies. Please click on the link below for further details.

National HIV & TB HCW Hotline survey

Are you a healthcare worker in the field of HIV in SA?

You are invited to take part in a research study being run by the National HIV & TB HCW Hotline at the University of Cape Town (UCT) to understand knowledge of parts of the new ART guidelines.

It would be appreciated if you could take the time to help with this anonymous short survey for healthcare workers. They are collecting this data to know whether you have received enough support and training about the new ART guidelines.

The survey data will be collected anonymously. There is an optional prize draw after completion (details stored separately from survey answers, to protect anonymity).

They hope to use the results to design interventions to assist healthcare workers and improve the transfer

of important ART-related information to the patient.

The survey can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/y3csemo9> and will be open for four weeks.

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

World Patient Safety Day – Health worker safety: a priority for patient safety

17 September 2020

Free zoom webinar for all health workers 10h00 -11h35

Led by the Directorate QA at the National Department of Health and supported by the BHPSA (Better Health Programmes South Africa)

Programme:

10h00 – 10h15: Opening address – Dr ZL Mkhize, the SA Minister of Health

10h15 – 10h25: Patient safety a world health priority – Dr OL Kaluwa, WHO Country Office

10h25 – 10h35: Carers caring for other carers: psychosocial support in the frontline – Dr C Lee - Healthcare Workers Care Network

10h35 – 10h45: Infection prevention and control (IPC): precious lessons and priorities – Prof S Mehtar - Member of Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) for COVID-19 and co-chair of National IPC working group

10h55 – 11h05: Occupational health and safety – Mr D Manamela – Member of MAC for Healthcare worker safety, representing DENOSA

11h05 – 11h25: Questions and answer session – All

11h25 – 11h35: Closing – Programme Director

Zoom Link to register: <https://tinyurl.com/yxnjdsn6>

Why advancing prevention? Dr Grania Brigden, Director of The Union's TB Department

The Union Conference News | 27 August 2020

Prevention is key to ending tuberculosis (TB). Yet it has been long neglected as a research and operational priority. Preventing lung disease is more urgent than ever as the world responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is pushing health systems worldwide to breaking point. That is why prevention will take centre stage at the 51st Union World Conference on Lung Health, 20-24 October 2020. The conference theme, Advancing Prevention, draws on commitments made at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on TB in 2018, which promised to end the TB emergency by preventing hundreds of thousands of infections and deaths every year.

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Our job vacancies are currently closed. Please do consult the Health Systems Trust website www.hst.org.za (careers section) on a regular basis for updates.

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