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## ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

### **Childhood asthma: A best-practice strategy for the diagnosis and assessment of control in South Africa**

*The South African Medical Journal* | 2 August 2021

*A van Niekerk, D White, P Goussard, S Risenga*

The South African (SA) Childhood Asthma Working Group of the Allergy Society of SA (ALLSA) advises on best-practice strategy for childhood asthma management. The strategy is in accordance with current evidence and consensus. The aim of this review is to inform on a best-practice strategy for asthma diagnosis and the assessment of asthma control in SA children who attend public and private healthcare services. The diagnosis of asthma is more difficult in preschool-aged than school-aged children. This review proposes a four-step diagnostic approach in both groups, with an added obligation to objectively measure variable expiratory airflow limitation in school-aged children. Asthma control refers to the degree to which the effects of asthma can be seen in patients, or to which these have been reduced by treatment. After initiation of treatment, it is essential to assess asthma control at regular follow-up visits, and to adjust treatment accordingly. Patient education is key to attaining control.

### **Should covid vaccination be mandatory for health and care staff?**

*The BMJ* | 5 August 2021

*Michael Parker, Helen Bedford, Michael Ussher, Martine Stead*

New English law will make vaccination a condition of employment for eligible care home workers, following similar moves in Italy, France, and Greece for healthcare staff. This is reasonable, argues Michael Parker, because care institutions have a duty to protect patients; but Helen Bedford, Michael Ussher, and Martine Stead worry that such a blunt approach is unnecessary and could be counterproductive.

### **Childcare and depression during the coronavirus pandemic in South Africa: A gendered analysis**

*PLOS ONE* | 6 August 2021

*Chijioke Nwosu*

The 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic resulted in the closure of businesses and schools,

the remote provision of services and the disruption of the services of professional childminders. These disruptions resulted in a significant increase in parental responsibility for childcare. Such a substantial increase in time requirements for childcare domestically has potential mental health consequences. We therefore ascertained the relationship between childcare and depression in South Africa during the pandemic.

### **Establishing targets for advanced HIV disease: A call to action**

*Southern African Journal of HIV Medicine* | 10 August 2021

*David Meya, Lillian Tugume, Vennie Nabitaka, Proscovia Namuwenge, Sam Phiri, et al.*

The World Health Organization (WHO) has published a guideline for the management of individuals with advanced HIV disease (AHD) to reduce HIV-related deaths. The guideline consists of a package of recommendations including interventions to prevent, diagnose and treat common opportunistic infections, including tuberculosis (TB), cryptococcosis and severe bacterial infections, along with rapid initiation of antiretroviral treatment and enhanced adherence support. Currently no clear targets exist for these key interventions. Emerging programmatic data from Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria suggest that an estimated 80% of eligible people continue to miss the recommended cryptococcal or TB testing, highlighting the remaining challenges to the effective implementation of WHO-recommended AHD packages of care in real-world resource-limited settings. The absence of mortality indicators for the leading causes of HIV-related deaths, because of the lack of mechanisms to ascertain cause of death, has had a negative impact on establishing interventions to reduce mortality.

### **Effects of adjusting public health, travel, and social measures during the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccination: a modelling study**

*The Lancet Public Health* | 10 August 2021

*Kathy Leung, Joseph Wu, Gabriel Leung*

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019, various public health and social measures (PHSMs) have been implemented globally to suppress and mitigate the spread of SARS-CoV-2, including mask wearing, travel restrictions, intensive test-trace-and-isolate, physical distancing, school closure, curfews, and targeted or nationwide lockdowns. Although these PHSMs are essential to control the spread of the pandemic, many PHSMs carry a high economic and social cost. The gross domestic product of the world declined by 3.5% in 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook released in January, 2021.<sup>1</sup> With mass vaccination programmes against COVID-19 being rolled out in a number of countries in early 2021, many countries are hoping that regional mass vaccinations will help to contain further spread of SARS-CoV-2, such that stringent travel restriction and other PHSMs can be relaxed to resume economic growth.

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## **RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS**

### **Covid-19: Junior doctors write to young people to acknowledge vaccine concerns**

*The BMJ News* | 6 August 2021

A group of junior doctors from Scotland have written to young people in their age group to try to ease concerns they may have about receiving the Covid-19 vaccine. In an open letter sent on Friday 6 August the doctors, all in their 20s and 30s, acknowledged the pandemic's effects on the lives of young people and that some were reluctant to be vaccinated.<sup>1</sup> "Young people have had to put parts of their lives on hold—which is frustrating. Sometimes it feels like we are just being left out. As young medics, we share that frustration. We want to get our lives back to normal as quickly as possible too," they wrote.

### **Fraudulent "COVID-19 Compensation Lottery Prize" scam, falsely alleges association with WHO and others**

*World Health Organization* | 6 August 2021

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been made aware of correspondences being circulated by scammers (acting under the name of Capital Finance, Inc. London), falsely notifying recipients of such correspondences that they have been selected as a beneficiary/winner of a US\$1 million lottery compensation prize payment for losses and damages suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These fraudulent correspondences falsely allege that the so-called “COVID-19 Lottery Compensation Prize” is brought to you by WHO, in association with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). These scammers—who claim to be a financial management firm in London—falsely state that they have been appointed by WHO to process payment of the “COVID-19 Lottery Compensation Prize”.

### **Why Maternal Mortality Is So High in Sub-Saharan Africa**

*Global Citizen* | 6 August 2021

Maternal deaths have declined worldwide over the past two decades and are down by more than a third due to affordable, quality health care services. Not all countries, however, have benefited from advancements in technology and care. Each year about 303,000 women die from complications related to pregnancy or childbirth. Where a person lives shouldn't determine if they die, yet almost all of the maternal deaths (99%) occur in developing countries. The majority of maternal deaths, approximately 85% in 2017, occurred in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, especially in regions with low numbers of skilled health care workers. Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounted for roughly two-thirds of maternal deaths in the world.

### **‘Worrying’ numbers of pregnant women in intensive care with Covid**

*The Guardian* | 10 August 2021

A record number of pregnant women were admitted to intensive care with Covid last month, data shows, as doctors raised concerns about vaccine hesitancy among expectant mothers and urged them to get jabbed as soon as possible. Figures from the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre (ICNARC) showed that in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 66 pregnant women ended up in intensive care in July, the highest number since the pandemic began and three times as many as April last year. A total of 46 recently pregnant women were also admitted to critical care.

### **South Africa: What's Missing in South Africa's Strategy to Get Breastfeeding Levels Up**

*allAfrica* | 10 August 2021

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the International Code for the Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. This was a landmark policy framework designed to stop commercial interests from discouraging breastfeeding and hence endangering the health and nutrition of the world's infants and young children. It was driven by research that showed human milk can meet all the nutritional needs of an infant during the first six months of life. In line with the code South Africa published regulations on infant formula in 2012. These stipulated a set of requirements in relation to product formulation, packaging and labelling, including clear and visible instructions for formula feeds. The regulations also prohibited direct marketing to the mothers, including rebates, marked down prices and free gifts and gadgets to incentivise sales. But South Africa still falls short of its breastfeeding target. The country failed to reach the ambitious exclusive breastfeeding target of 75% by 2017. By 2016 only 32% of babies were being exclusively breastfed.

### **Unvaccinated People Are Increasing the Chances for More Coronavirus Variants — Here's How**

*Healthline* | 10 August 2021

Chances are, the coronavirus variant known as Epsilon might not be on your radar, but scientists sure are watching it. First discovered in California last December, it's now spreading in Pakistan. “This is worrisome, as it is more transmissible than original strains of the virus,” said Dr. Purvi Parikh, an allergist and immunologist with the Allergy and Asthma Network in New York City. She added, “there is some early evidence” that the variant could be resistant to the vaccines. So far, scientists in the United States say COVID-19 vaccines seem to be holding up against a new crop of variants that include Gamma, Lambda, Delta Plus, and even the Delta variant that's responsible for 90 percent of new cases in the country. But some experts are worried the clock is ticking.

### **Women's Health In Africa Is A Pressing Human Rights Issue**

*Longevity* | 10 August 2021

August is Women's Month. As we examine global women's issues more closely, we are reminded of the topic of women's health in Africa. This is a subject that is increasingly being framed by the vital role that diagnostics plays in ensuring that long-term health across the continent improves and is preserved.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), maternal health – or the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period and reproductive health – is a human rights issue. Across the African continent, there are considerable gaps in maternal health interventions like antenatal care. While southern Africa reported almost universal coverage in 2010, about one third of pregnant women in West Africa did not receive antenatal care visits.

### **When you should get your second Covid-19 shot in South Africa – and why you may need a booster down the line.**

*BusinessTech | 11 August 2021*

New research shows that Moderna's vaccine may be the best option against the Delta variant of Covid-19 – and that a booster shot may be necessary if you have taken any of the other available vaccines. In a study of more than 50,000 patients in the Mayo Clinic Health System, researchers found the effectiveness of Moderna's vaccine against infection had dropped to 76% in July, when the Delta variant was predominant. This was down from 86% in early 2021, Reuters reported. Over the same period, the effectiveness of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine had fallen to 42% from 76%, the researchers said.

### **Answering the burning questions on young people and Covid-19**

*Maverick Citizen | 11 August 2021*

On Tuesday Daily Maverick in partnership with RX Radio, which broadcasts nationwide in children's hospital wards offering medical information as well as a platform for children to raise concerns on health issues, held a webinar moderated by Maverick Citizen editor Mark Heywood. The webinar focused on how Covid-19 affected children and addressed concerns on whether the vaccine is safe for children. In the discussion were public health and infectious diseases expert Professor Salim Abdool Karim and 18-year-old children's radio host Alex White from RX Radio.

### **The WHO says Marburg virus has the potential to 'spread far and wide', after fatal case in West Africa**

*Business Insider | 11 August 2021*

A man in Guinea, West Africa, has died after contracting the Marburg virus, which causes internal bleeding and organ failure. The World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed the man's death on August 9 and said the "highly infectious disease" has the potential to "spread far and wide." This marks the first time the Marburg virus has ever been detected in Guinea, per the WHO.

### **Women in Health: Young TB researcher blazing a trail**

*Spotlight | 12 August 2021*

It started with a promise to a little girl called Mary. Dr Caroline Pule (31) recalls she was about 13 years old when she read about the girl and how she lost both her parents to HIV. That same day, says Pule, she wrote in her diary, "Don't worry, Mary, I will find the cure for HIV. I will go find a cure for HIV." It was this story about Mary and how HIV was killing people that made Pule vow to do something about it. HIV can be suppressed in the body with life-saving antiretroviral medicines, but a cure or effective vaccine still remains elusive.

### **COVID crash course: A walkthrough of everything you need to know about viruses, variants and vaccines**

*Bhekisisa | 12 August 2021*

While **half of the population of the United States has been fully vaccinated against COVID-19**, South Africa has covered **less than 10% of its total population**, mainly as a result of not being able to procure enough jabs. Companies can simply not produce enough shots for the world's needs, and because wealthy countries could afford to pay for vaccines before manufacturers knew how well they would work, countries like South Africa remain at the back of the queue. In the rest of Africa, **the situation is far worse**. Unlike South Africa, most governments on the continent can't afford to buy vaccines directly from manufacturers. The only way for such countries to get shots is to buy them via the international procurement mechanism, **COVAX**. This means they only have access to the brands and numbers of jabs COVAX has procured.

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## TRAINING AND RESOURCES

### **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

### **Behavioral and Clinical Characteristics of Persons Living with Diagnosed HIV Infection—Medical Monitoring Project, United States, 2019 Cycle**

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | August 2021*

This report is based, in part, on contributions by Medical Monitoring Project (MMP) participants, community and provider advisory boards, interviewers, and abstractors; the Data Coordinating Center for HIV Supplemental Surveillance at ICF International; and members of the Clinical Outcomes Team, Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, CDC, Atlanta, Georgia.

### **Guidance for surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 variants: Interim guidance, 9 August 2021**

*The WHO | 9 August 2021*

This document aims to describe a minimum set of surveillance activities recommended at the national level to detect and monitor the relative prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 variants and outline a set of activities for the characterization and assessment of risk posed by these variants. A set of indicators is also provided to standardize monitoring and public reporting of variant circulation.

The document is primarily intended for national and sub-national public health authorities and partners who support implementation of surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 variants. It complements the interim guidance on Public health surveillance for COVID-19, which provides overall guidance for public health surveillance of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in humans. Additional guidance has been published for laboratory stakeholders on diagnostic testing for SARS-CoV-2 and sequencing for public health goals, alongside an implementation guide for SARS-CoV-2 sequencing.

### **Fast Facts on Climate Change and Health**

*The WHO | 10 August 2021*

Climate change is resulting in poorer health outcomes, increasing mortality and is a driver of health inequities. However, health is well placed to be a significant part of the solution; the positive health impacts from stronger climate change action can motivate stronger global ambition; health systems which are resilient to climate change can help protect their populations from the negative impacts (in the short and longer terms); and sustainable low carbon health systems can make a substantial contribution to reducing national and global emissions.

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## CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### **SAMA Virtual Conference**

*COVID review*

Date: 21 August 2021

Time: 14:00 – 18:00

*Ethics Workshop*

Date: 22 August 2021

Time: 09:00 – 14:00

*Practising Medicine During a Pandemic*

Date: 29 August 2021

Time: 09:00 – 14:00

Register for these  
events: [https://www.exbo.co.za/REG/dynamic\\_forms/generated\\_forms/sama\\_2021\\_virtual\\_register.php](https://www.exbo.co.za/REG/dynamic_forms/generated_forms/sama_2021_virtual_register.php)

**Regional Committee for Africa: seventy-first session**

The Seventy-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa is expected to be held in a virtual format from 24 to 26 August 2021. The virtual session will be held under Special procedures for the conduct of the virtual session of the Regional Committee for Africa. The provisional agenda of the meeting was shared with all participants with the invitation letters. More details to follow.

**Strengthening Infection Prevention and Control Activities and Embedding IPC in AMR NAP Implementation**

Date: 2 September 2021

Time: 10:00 (CET) and 14:00 (CET)

Speakers: Prof. Benedetta Allegranzi, Technical Lead, IPC Hub and Task Force, WHO HQ, and Dr. Maha Talaat Ismail, Regional Adviser, AMR & Infection Control, WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, Cairo, Egypt.

10:00 (CET) registration: [https://who.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_YW\\_gokieSrKPHRw8x6bv5A](https://who.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_YW_gokieSrKPHRw8x6bv5A)14:00 (CET) registration: [https://who.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_G5-JlrMFSHK3YonPNkPCNA](https://who.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_G5-JlrMFSHK3YonPNkPCNA)**Less alcohol webinar series: are policy actions at pace with evidence?**

Date: 3 September 2021

Time: 14:00 – 15:30 (CET)

The proportion of current drinkers and heavy drinking will globally increase by 2030. Irrespective of these trends, the impact of alcohol consumption is already alarming in terms of social, economic and health consequences. Alcohol consumption has also exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to increased virus-induced inflammation and potentially worsening COVID-related outcomes.

Despite these compelling figures, the alcohol field remains behind schedule to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. In recent years, the divide between evidence and applied policies for reducing the harmful use of alcohol has broadened. The new evidence about the effect of alcohol consumption in cancers, the progress made in some countries, the stocktake and agreement on what works to reduce the harmful use of alcohol, the establishment and reinforcement of civil society organisations, the increasing interest of countries in tackling the commercial determinants of alcohol, among many other factors, set out a momentum for strengthening the connections among different stakeholders.

For more information, contact: [Lessalcohol@who.int](mailto:Lessalcohol@who.int)

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## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

**BORDER HEALTH PROJECT: Independent Contractor**

Border Health Preparedness Assessment and Country Readiness Plans' (or 'Border Health') project

Closing Date: 15 August 2021

**HEALTH SYSTEMS TRAINING INSTITUTE (HSTi): Community Mobilisation Co-ordinator – DO ART Project**

Closing date: 23 August 2021

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