



CATEGORIES

[Academic and Peer Reviewed Articles](#)

[Recent Public Health News](#)

[Training and Resources](#)

[Publications and Reports](#)

[Conferences and Events](#)

[Job Opportunities](#)

ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Association of Mortality and Years of Potential Life Lost With Active Tuberculosis in the United States

JAMA Network | 23 September 2020

Christian Lee-Rodriguez, Paul Wada, Yun-Yi Hung et al

Active tuberculosis (TB) disease leads to substantial mortality but is preventable through screening and treatment for latent TB infection. Early mortality after TB diagnosis (≤ 1 year) is well described, but delayed mortality (> 1 year) among patients with active TB is poorly understood. The Objective was to compare early and delayed mortality and years of potential life (YPL) lost among patients with active TB disease vs an age-, sex-, and year of diagnosis–matched comparison cohort without active TB disease.

SARS-CoV-2 vaccines in development

Nature | 23 September 2020

Florian Krammer

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) emerged in late 2019 in China and caused a coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. To mitigate the public health, economic and societal impacts of the virus, a vaccine is urgently needed. The development of SARS-CoV-2 vaccines was initiated in early January 2020 when the sequence of the virus became available and moved at record speed with one Phase I trial already starting in March 2020 and currently more than 180 vaccines in various stages of development. Phase I/II trial data is already available for several vaccine candidates and many have moved into Phase III trials. The data available so far suggests that effective and safe vaccines might become available within months rather than years.

Massive and rapid COVID-19 testing is feasible by extraction-free SARS-CoV-2 RT-PCR

Nature Communications | 23 September 2020

Ioanna Smyrliaki, Martin Ekman, Antonio Lentini, Nuno Rufino de Sousa, Natali Papanicolaou et al

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), is commonly diagnosed by reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) to

detect viral RNA in patient samples, but RNA extraction constitutes a major bottleneck in current testing. Methodological simplification could increase diagnostic availability and efficiency, benefitting patient care and infection control. Here, we describe methods circumventing RNA extraction in COVID-19 testing by performing RT-PCR directly on heat-inactivated or lysed samples. Our data, including benchmarking using 597 clinical patient samples and a standardised diagnostic system, demonstrate that direct RT-PCR is a viable option to extraction-based tests. Using controlled amounts of active SARS-CoV-2, we confirm effectiveness of heat inactivation by plaque assay and evaluate various generic buffers as transport medium for direct RT-PCR. Significant savings in time and cost are achieved through RNA-extraction-free protocols that are directly compatible with established PCR-based testing pipelines. This could aid expansion of COVID-19 testing.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

90–90–90: good progress, but the world is off-track for hitting the 2020 targets

development aid | 22 September 2020

In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly's Political Declaration on Ending AIDS committed countries to the 90–90–90 targets, which aim to bring HIV testing and treatment to the vast majority of people living with HIV by the end of 2020 and to reduce the amount of HIV in their bodies to undetectable levels, so they keep healthy and to prevent the further spread of the virus. Globally, there have been remarkable gains across the HIV testing and treatment cascade. At the end of 2019, 81% of people living with HIV knew their HIV status, and more than two thirds (67%) were on antiretroviral therapy, equal to an estimated 25.4 million of the 38.0 million people living with HIV—a number that has more than tripled since 2010.

By any means necessary: defending human rights in Uganda in the time of COVID-19

UNAIDS | 22 September 2020

Adrian Jjuuko heads up the team at Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) in Kampala, Uganda. He is the dictionary definition of an ally—a heterosexual lawyer who defends people who live on the margins of Ugandan society: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, sex workers, refugees, people who use drugs and women who are survivors of domestic violence. Mr Jjuuko founded HRAPF in 2008 to create awareness of human rights and provide legal support to marginalized people, mostly members of the LGBTI community.

Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation

World Health Organisation | 23 September 2020

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is the first pandemic in history in which technology and social media are being used on a massive scale to keep people safe, informed, productive and connected. At the same time, the technology we rely on to keep connected and informed is enabling and amplifying an infodemic that continues to undermine the global response and jeopardizes measures to control the pandemic.

LSHTM to evaluate public attitudes towards new COVID-19 contact-tracing app

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine | 24 September 2020

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine's (LSHTM) Policy Innovation and Evaluation Research Unit is to lead a new study to understand public attitudes towards the new COVID-19 contact-tracing app and use of the technology

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

OER Africa Free Training Resources

The African Health OER Network seeks to enable participants to develop, adapt, and share health education resources to augment limited human and other resources in the health sector and impact positively on overall health provision in Africa and beyond. The mission of the Network was to advance health education in Africa by using open educational resources (OER) to share knowledge, address curriculum gaps, and support communities around health education.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

The latest edition of HST's Phakama Digest features in-depth perspectives on the SA SURE project's continuity of HIV and TB services during COVID-19.

https://www.hst.org.za/publications/HST%20Publications/Phakama%20Digest%20July%202020_FINAL.pdf

Closing the gap in South Africa's early learning provision: the case for a national delivery platform

<https://www.hst.org.za/publications/NonHST%20Publications/ECD%20provisioning%20gap%20and%20case%20for%20NDP%20FINAL.pdf>

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.

<https://www.hst.org.za/media/Pages/SAHR-2021-Call-for-Abstracts.aspx>

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Free Bhekisisa Webinar where the panel will discuss moral choices and what #COVID19SA doctors can learn from #HIV.

30 September 2020 | <https://bit.ly/2FGF3Jd>

BREAST CANCER IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

The ESMO Webinar Series | <https://www.esmo.org/meetings/esmo-webinar-series/managing-patients-in-the-covid-19-era/breast-cancer-in-the-era-of-covid-19>

5th Public Health Conference – Theme: Accelerating progress towards Universal Health Coverage

14 October 2020 | *Gallagher Convention Centre*

This conference will gather leading experts across the public health spectrum to build on the global commitments and experiences learned from pioneering African countries who are implementing UHC. The agenda will adopt a whole-system approach to achieving UHC and will consider both the supply and demand side interventions. This 1-day conference will be an ideal event for public health professionals, the private health sector and civil society to hear from national and international experts on concrete

actions to achieve UHC by 2030.

Conference chair: Dr Moeketsi Modisenyane, Director: International Health and Development, National Department of Health; President, PHASA, Johannesburg, South Africa

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

HST Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) Directorate – Area Monitoring and Evaluation Officer

Closing date: 6 October 2020

HST Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) Directorate – District Training Co-ordinator

Closing date: 6 October 2020

HST Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) Directorate – Facility Team Leads (Zululand)

Closing date: 6 October 2020

[\(Return to Top\)](#)



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