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ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Fertility rates and birth outcomes after ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 (AZD1222) vaccination

The Lancet | 21 October 2021

Kushalini Hilson, Sue Clemens, Shabir Madhi, Merryn Voysey, Andrew Pollard, et al.

Fears of adverse effects of COVID-19 vaccination on fertility have affected vaccine uptake in some communities. Despite the absence of supporting evidence for such a risk, low biological plausibility, and preliminary data supporting the safety of mRNA vaccines in pregnancy, this claim has become widespread, and it has been challenged by WHO.⁴ Vaccine hesitancy during pregnancy, or among women of childbearing age, could have substantial public health consequences because infection with SARS-CoV-2 during pregnancy is a risk factor for severe maternal illness and complications. We have analysed pregnancies that have occurred in four ongoing phase 1, phase 2, and phase 3 clinical trials of ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 (AZD1222)⁷ in three countries (NCT04324606 and NCT04400838 in the UK; NCT04536051 in Brazil; and NCT04444674 in South Africa).

Women's sexual scripting in the context of universal access to antiretroviral treatment—findings from the HPTN 071 (PopART) trial in South Africa

BMC Women's Health | 24 October 2021

Lario Viljoen, Graeme Hoddinott, Samantha Malunga, Nosivuyile Vanqa, Tembeka Mhlakwaphalwa, et al.

HIV treatment-based prevention modalities present new opportunities for women to make decisions around sex, intimacy, and prevention. The Universal test and treat (UTT) strategy, where widespread HIV testing is implemented and all people with HIV can access treatment, has the potential to change how sex is understood and HIV prevention incorporated into sexual relationships. We use the frame of sexual scripting to explore how women attribute meaning to sex relative to UTT in an HIV prevention trial setting. Exploring women's sexual narratives, we explored how HIV prevention feature in the sexual scripts for women who had access to UTT in South Africa (prior to treatment guideline changes) and increased HIV prevention messaging, compared to places without widespread access to HIV testing and immediate access to treatment.

Evaluating the impact of DREAMS on HIV incidence among adolescent girls and young women: A population-based cohort study in Kenya and South Africa

PLOS Medicine | 25 October 2021

Isolde Birdthistle, Daniel Kwaro, Maryam Shahmanesh, Kathy Baisley, Sammy Khagayi

Through a multisectoral approach, the DREAMS Partnership aimed to reduce HIV incidence among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) by 40% over 2 years in high-burden districts across sub-Saharan Africa. DREAMS promotes a combination package of evidence-based interventions to reduce individual, family, partner, and community-based drivers of young women's heightened HIV risk. We evaluated the impact of DREAMS on HIV incidence among AGYW and young men in 2 settings.

Effect of early treatment with fluvoxamine on risk of emergency care and hospitalisation among patients with COVID-19: the TOGETHER randomised, platform clinical trial

The Lancet Global Health | 27 October 2021

Gilmar Reis, Eduardo Moreira-Silva, Daniela Medeiros Silva, Lehana Thabane, Aline Milagres, et al.

Although safe and effective vaccines for COVID-19 have been developed and distributed, there remain, particularly in low resource settings, major challenges regarding their production, allocation, and affordability. Identifying inexpensive, widely available, and effective therapies against COVID-19 is, therefore, of great importance. In particular, repurposing existing medicines that are widely available and with well understood safety profiles, has particular appeal. Fluvoxamine is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) and a σ -1 receptor (S1R) agonist. There are several potential mechanisms for fluvoxamine in treatment of COVID-19 illness, including anti-inflammatory and possible antiviral effects.⁴ A small placebo-controlled, randomised trial has raised the possibility that fluvoxamine might reduce the risk of clinical deterioration in outpatients with COVID-19, suggesting the need for larger randomised, placebo-controlled studies. To evaluate the efficacy of fluvoxamine to prevent progression of COVID-19 and hospitalisation among outpatients with laboratory-documented SARS-CoV-2, we did a randomised, placebo-controlled, adaptive platform trial in Minas Gerais, Brazil. This flexible platform trial design allows for additional agents to be added and tested with standardised operating procedures outlined in a single overarching master protocol.

UNITE4TB: a new consortium for clinical drug and regimen development for TB

The Union | November 2021 edition

J.M Boeree, C Lange, G Thwaites, N Paton, R de Vruueh, et al.

After decades of limited progress, the development of novel anti-TB medicines was revitalised at the start of the 21st century through new initiatives and investments. This has resulted in innovations in treatment regimens thanks to new compounds becoming available and the re-purposing of existing drugs. However, progress has been relatively slow for a disease that, until the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, has remained the top infectious killer worldwide. Accelerated action is therefore necessary to reach the ambitious target of "ending TB" set by the WHO within its new Global Strategy (2016–2030). We are now at the start of a new era. With financial support from the Innovative Medicine Initiative (IMI) in Europe and the German Federal Ministry of Research and Education (BmBF), the UNITE4TB Consortium will begin work in 2021.

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RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

Slow start to inoculation programme for children between 12 and 17

Maverick Citizen | 20 October 2021

Vaccination sites expected a rush of children between the ages of 12 and 17 on the first day of the roll-out of the programme, but few teenagers made it to the sites. In South Africa, the vaccination programme for children between the ages of 12 and 17 is under way. According to the National Department of Health, children between these ages are eligible for only one dose of the Pfizer vaccine. Daily Maverick visited some Johannesburg vaccination sites in sub-district D.

WHO and partners call for action to better protect health and care workers from COVID-19

World Health Organization | 21 October 2021

The World Health Organization and partners have issued an urgent call for concrete action to better protect health and care workers worldwide from COVID-19 and other health issues. The organizations are concerned that large numbers of health and care workers have died from COVID-19, but also that an increasing proportion of the workforce are suffering from burnout, stress, anxiety and fatigue. In a Joint Statement issued this week, WHO and partners are calling on all Member State governments and stakeholders to strengthen the monitoring and reporting of COVID-19 infections, ill-health and deaths among health and care workers. They should also include disaggregation by age, gender and occupation as a standard procedure, to enable decision makers and scientists to identify and implement mitigation measures that will further reduce the risk of infections and ill-health. The Statement also urges political leaders and policy makers to do all within their power to make regulatory, policy and investment decisions that ensure the protection of health and care workers. It highlights the opportunity to align this with a forthcoming global health and care worker compact and the International Labour Organization's call for a human-centered recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

A breakthrough in the treatment of drug-resistant TB signals shorter and safer treatment for patients

Health-E News | 21 October 2021

People battling rifampicin-resistant tuberculosis (RR-TB) could soon have access to a shorter and safer course of treatment. Doctors without Borders (MSF) have released the results from a clinical trial on an all oral six-month treatment regime. Current treatment can last almost two years and can include painful injections and taking up to 20 pills a day. `And it cures only one in two patients. One participant in the trial, Awande Ndlovu, said it is easier to comply with the new treatment regime. "The shorter treatment would mean a lot as I think when you are on treatment, some parts of your life feel like they are put on hold. Before the trial gave me hope, I couldn't even see the slightest glimpse of recovering from MDR-TB," he said. Ndlovu was one of 559 patients from seven sites in Belarus, South Africa, and Uzbekistan who took part in the trial. Participants were put on a six-month regime of of bedaquiline, pretomanid, linezolid and moxifloxacin (BPaLM).

Medical circumcision: FS group urges boys to reconsider

Health-E News | 21 October 2021

A Free State men's health advocacy group is encouraging men and boys to consider undergoing medical circumcision instead of the traditional practice. And, in doing so, they won't be placing themselves at risk after 13 initiates died in the Eastern Cape last year. Culturally, circumcision is regarded as a sacred rite of passage. Every year thousands of youths enter initiation schools where circumcision is one aspect of the practice. However, as the traditional circumcisions are not carried out in clinical conditions, initiates are often injured or die.

We have a crisis: South Africa urgently needs leadership to roll out Covid-19 vaccine mandates

Daily Maverick | 25 October 2021

About 35% of the nation is vaccinated, woefully short of the desired target of 90% most experts agree we need to avert the disastrous consequences of recurring Covid-19 waves. While there are aspects of the South African response to Covid-19 to date that are commendable, the deafening silence on vaccine mandates that have proven effective elsewhere around the globe is hard to understand. In July this year, France introduced a health passport with proof of either vaccination, a negative Covid-19 test or of past infection required to enter public places. This increased vaccine coverage to 75% and reduced hospitalisation and death significantly. If this pandemic was a war and more than 250,000 South African lives had been lost, one can only begin to imagine the clamour for the state to do whatever was necessary to resist the invasion and end the carnage. And yet, according to the SA Medical Research Council, excess mortality has been a shocking 264,809 over the past 18 months.

The clock is ticking for South Africa ahead of fourth Covid-19 wave in December, analysts warn

BusinessTech | 25 October 2021

South Africa's vaccination programme is in a race against time, with the fourth wave of Covid-19 infections expected to hit the country in December 2021 and into January 2022, says the Actuarial Society of South Africa (ASSA). Based on the group's analysis of the Covid-19 experiences in South Africa and several

other countries at different stages of managing the pandemic, ASSA believes that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that a fourth wave is likely to emerge in December. The severity will most likely depend on whether South Africa achieves its vaccination targets, it said.

In-depth: How are depression and bipolar disorder treated in the public sector?

Spotlight | 25 October 2021

It is estimated that “one in ten adults living in South Africa will have experienced major clinical depression at some point in their life but only 25% have sought treatment and care for their mental conditions, such as depression”. Although these estimates are based on the South African Stress and Health (SASH) study, last done in 2009, subsequent studies have also stressed the challenge of reducing this treatment gap.

Covid-19 testing is too expensive and too difficult in South Africa

GroundUp Editors | 25 October 2021

One of our staff members started coughing at work. She’s vaccinated and she also had Covid last year, but we decided not to take chances. So one of us took her to a drive-in Covid test centre run by a large pathology company at a private hospital in Cape Town. We were the only client. We asked for an antigen test. Covid antigen tests are accurate enough when someone has a high viral load. In contrast to PCR tests which take a day or two because they have to be done in a lab, antigen tests give a result within 30 minutes. They are excellent for detecting when someone with Covid is infectious. Sorry, the nurse on duty told us, you can only get tested if you have a referral from a doctor. This is technically true according to National Institute of Communicable Diseases guidelines but one of us had previously been tested at the same facility without any referral. This is an unimaginative, bureaucratic approach to Covid testing. South Africa has done about 18 million Covid tests. The UK, with only a slightly larger population, has done 320 million tests. Colombia, with a slightly smaller population, has done 26 million tests.

Tracto: Online tool give parents welcome peace of mind

Health-E News | 25 October 2021

A new app called Tracto, which allows parents of children with mental health challenges to keep track of what’s going on in their lives, has brought much-needed relief in managing behaviour and treatment with the touch of a button. Developed in South Africa, the free app enables parents and teachers to collaboratively track any new developments among children with mental health or neurodiverse conditions including ADHD, autism and anxiety. After allowing for more accurate, in-time documenting of observations, Tracto then facilitates the convenient sharing of information with health care providers. Tracto was made available on app stores in July after two years of research and development and is already being used by more than 200 parents.

Covid-19 is killing more South Africans than cancer – and everything else: Discovery Life

Business Insider | 27 October 2021

For people with life insurance, cancer is usually a big killer, says Discovery Life. Covid-19 is now bigger. It is also bigger than heart disease – and everything else combined. In the 2021 year, up to August, deaths attributed to Covid-19 stood at 57% of its total claims, said Discovery Life in an annual analysis of its data. That compares to an average, over nine years, of 27% of deaths from various heart and artery diseases.

Booster basics – Will South Africans need an extra COVID shot?

Bhekisisa | 28 October 2021

Nine months after just under half a million healthcare workers in South Africa were vaccinated with one shot of Johnson & Johnson (J&J) in the country’s Sisonke implementation trial, they’re likely to get a second shot of the same vaccine in a new leg of the study. The Sisonke study ran from February to May and immunised 496 900 healthcare workers with J&J’s COVID jab. The programme used leftover stock from J&J’s international vaccine trials and ran at a time when South Africa had no other jabs available. The local study’s goal was to provide protection to South Africa’s frontline workers.

Booster jabs for health workers to start rolling out on November 8

Business Day | 29 October 2021

Almost half-a-million healthcare workers who received a Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Covid-19 vaccine

under the Sisonke study this year are to be offered a booster shot from November 8, acting health director-general Nicholas Crisp confirmed on Thursday. Pressure has been mounting on the government to provide booster shots to high-risk groups such as healthcare workers ahead of a possible fourth wave of infections in December, as a steadily growing number of countries are now recommending their use. The US, for example, has approved Pfizer, Moderna and J&J shots as boosters. It also says adults who received a J&J jab more than two months ago can receive boosters, and allows eligible people to mix and match their shots...

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TRAINING AND RESOURCES

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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.

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

Community Engagement through Women's Self-Help Groups

World Health Organization | 26 October 2021

The Lok Swasthya SEWA Trust, supported by SEWA, was established in 2005. LSST organizes women for self-reliance, both financial and in terms of decision-making capacity, and helps them obtain full employment at the household level which translates to a better socio-economic and health status. LSST focuses on promotion, prevention, and curative services aimed at improving the health of poor women and their families.

Guideline for clinical management of exposure to lead

World Health Organization | 27 October 2021

The purpose of the WHO Guideline for clinical management of exposure to lead is to assist physicians in making decisions about the diagnosis and treatment of lead exposure for individual patients and in mass poisoning incidents.

The guideline presents evidence-informed recommendations on:

- the interpretation of blood lead concentrations;
- use of gastrointestinal decontamination;
- use of a chelating agent; and
- use of nutritional supplements.

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

ISSAD Global Conference on Group B Strep

Date: 3 – 5 November 2021

At the opening session of ISSAD 2021 (the Global Group B Strep Conference), WHO together with the

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine will launch The global value of Group B streptococcus vaccine... Time to act! This new report includes extensive new data and analyses on the impacts of Group B Strep (GBS) bacteria on child survival, disability and preterm births, and present a value case for new maternal vaccines. The Conference is organized in partnership with the Meningitis Research Foundation (MRF), and is hosted by LSHTM and WHO. GBS accounts for more than the combined neonatal deaths from tetanus, pertussis, and respiratory syncytial virus, for which maternal vaccines are already in use or advanced stages of development. However, no vaccine is currently available for maternal GBS. The 2nd International Symposium on 'Streptococcus agalactiae' Disease (ISSAD) will cover topics ranging from the GBS disease burden challenges to the epidemiology, immunology, and vaccinology of GBS.

Register here to attend this free virtual global conference: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/issad-conference-2021-registration-155613876293>

2021 Global Conference on Health and Climate Change

World Health Organization | 6 November 2021

The 2021 Global Conference on Health & Climate Change, with a special focus on Climate Justice and the Healthy and Green Recovery from COVID-19, will convene on the margins of the COP26 UN climate change conference. The aim of the conference is to call on governments, businesses, institutions and financial actors to drive a green, healthy and resilient recovery from COVID-19. The Conference will support and highlight countries' ambitious and just Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement that promote and protect health. It will also mobilize the rapidly growing movement of health professionals around the world who are now driving ambitious climate action.

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The Health Systems Trust currently has no available jobs.

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