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## ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

### **The Lancet Microbe**

*The Lancet Global Health | February 2021*

The February issue is now online. It includes articles on multiplex assays for identification of #SARSCoV2 serological signatures, estimation of correlates of protection of an #Ebola vaccine, and insight into SARS-CoV-2 RT-PCR using serological data.

### **Prevalence and Factors Associated with Mental and Emotional Health Outcomes among Africans during the COVID-19 Lockdown Period—A Web-based Cross-Sectional Study**

*Environmental Research and Public Health | 21 January 2021*

*Raymond Langsi, Uchechukwu Osuagwu, Piwuna Goson, Emmanuel Kwasi Abu, et al.*

Mental health and emotional responses to the effects of COVID-19 lockdown in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are of serious public health concern and may negatively affect the mental health status of people. Hence, this study assessed the prevalence of mental health symptoms as well as emotional reactions among sub-Saharan Africans (SSAs) and associated factors among SSAs during the COVID-19 lockdown period. This was a web-based cross-sectional study on mental health and emotional features from 2005 respondents in seven SSA countries. This study was conducted between 17 April and 17 May 2020 corresponding to the lockdown period in most SSA countries. Respondents aged 18 years and above and the self-reported symptoms were feeling anxious, being worried, angry, bored and frustrated. These were the main outcomes and were treated as dichotomous variables. Univariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses were used to identify the factors associated with these symptoms. We found that over half (52.2%) of the participants reported any of the mental health symptoms and the prevalence of feeling bored was 70.5% followed by feeling anxious (59.1%), being worried (57.5%), frustrated (51.5%) and angry (22.3%) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Multivariate analysis revealed that males, those aged >28 years, those who lived in Central and Southern Africa, those who were not married, the unemployed, those living with more than six persons in a household, had higher odds of mental health and emotional symptoms.

## **Fertility Preservation in Childhood, Adolescent, and Young Adult Cancer – Series**

*The Lancet Oncology* | 2 February 2021

*Renée Mulder, Anna Font-Gonzalez, Melissa Hudson, Hanneke van Santen, Erik A H Loeffen, et al.*

Children, adolescent, and young adult patients with cancer are at increased risk for infertility if treatment adversely impacts reproductive function. Although fertility management in the cancer setting has emerged as an important issue, international harmonised guidelines are lacking and every country has diverse strategies, reducing consistent and timely implementation of effective fertility preserving interventions. In this Series of papers in *The Lancet Oncology*, Mulder and colleagues present guidelines from the PanCareLIFE consortium and the International Late Effects of Childhood Cancer Guideline Harmonization Group with fertility preservation recommendations for female and male patients with childhood, adolescent, and young adult cancer, and for ongoing communication and ethical considerations. Global dissemination of these recommendations will help health-care providers effectively care for young patients with cancer and meet the needs of patients and their families when making decisions to preserve fertility.

## **Why aren't covid-19 vaccines being manufactured in standard prefilled syringes?**

*The BMJ* | 3 February 2021

Prefilled syringes are the safest and standard recommended delivery device for most modern vaccines—so why are covid-19 vaccines being packaged in glass vials in the middle of a global glass shortage? Jane Feinmann reports. By 24 January 2021 more than 5.8 million people in the UK had been given their first dose of covid-19 vaccine. The achievement is all the more remarkable given the tough and time consuming safety precautions that must be taken. For the AstraZeneca injection, healthcare professionals, working alone or in pairs, take “full responsibility” for following a lengthy, itemised standard operating procedure, which was published for NHS use only by the Specialist Pharmacy Service on 7 January 2021. As well as guidance on preparing the workstation and removing vaccines from the refrigerator, the checklist involves a 12 step guide to filling up to 10 syringes from each vaccine vial. This involves carefully cleansing the vial “bung” before puncturing it in 10 different places to withdraw each dose into a single use syringe. This procedure is far removed from normal vaccination practice. At least in high income countries, prefilled syringes are now the norm for influenza injections, heparin injections, and millions of injectable medications. This is in line with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society’s guidance on the safe and secure handling of medicines<sup>1</sup> to “minimise the manipulation of medicines outside of pharmacy,” said William Harrop-Griffiths, chair of the Royal College of Anaesthetists’ Clinical Quality and Research board, at its launch in 2018. David Whitaker, a retired anaesthetist and chair of the patient safety committee of the European Board of Anaesthesiology, is concerned that the decision to use multidose vials for covid-19 vaccinations ignores this guidance. “The method is unchanged from Jonas Salk’s polio vaccinations over 70 years ago,” says Whitaker. “It’s as if people are being made to use fountain pens and bottles of ink instead of biros.”

## **Safety, tolerability, and immunogenicity of an inactivated SARS-CoV-2 vaccine (CoronaVac) in healthy adults aged 60 years and older: a randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled, phase 1/2 clinical trial**

*The Lancet Infectious Diseases* | 3 February 2021

A vaccine against COVID-19 is urgently needed for older adults, in whom morbidity and mortality due to the disease are increased. The study aimed to assess the safety, tolerability, and immunogenicity of a candidate COVID-19 vaccine, CoronaVac, containing inactivated SARS-CoV-2, in adults aged 60 years and older.

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## **RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS**

### **EXPERT OPINION: Veterinary ivermectin: Should I use it to protect me from COVID-19?**

*University of Pretoria* | 31 January 2021

Since the release of the first articles on the potential effectiveness of ivermectin, there have been several

questions on the use of the cattle drug in people, since it is available over the counter as a veterinary drug. Prof Vinny Naidoo, Dean of the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Veterinary Science and specialist in veterinary pharmacology weighs in on the debate \* The simple answer is no, don't use it; since it is illegal to use a veterinary drug or stock remedy in people. Notwithstanding this point, many people have still been taking ivermectin orally since they have heard that ivermectin has been tested in clinical studies abroad under the premise that any ivermectin should work. The compassionate use of ivermectin approved by the SA Health Products Regulatory Authority is still limited to only the medical drug, and will need approval by the SAHPRA through its section 21 process (From SAHPRA: "Only quality-assured ivermectin products intended for human use will be made accessible, and these will be controlled as prescription-only Schedule 3 medicines. There is no doubt that ivermectin has been used for a number of years in the veterinary and medical fields for the treatment of parasites. The drug is generally considered safe and effective at the doses of use, however overdose can cause severe side effects such as paralysis in dogs. In animals, various formulations are available for use from oral solutions to long acting injectables. In people, it generally is used orally, for example, in Merck's Stromectol although intravenous use of specific formulations has been recorded (please note that intravenous formulations are specifically made to go directly into a vein. Oral and other injectable formulations can be extremely dangerous if injected intravenously incorrectly/accidentally). So, does this mean any of these formulations that contain ivermectin will be equally effective? The answer is unfortunately no, as the formulation plays as much of a role in eventual efficacy as the active ingredient, in this case being ivermectin. LISTEN TO AN INTERVIEW WITH PROF NAIDOO ON THE TOPIC ON SAfm <http://bit.ly/3t9RzF3>

### **Now the hard part – distributing the Covid-19 vaccine**

*Health E-News | 2 February 2021*

As South African's welcomed the first million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine questions remain about how effectively they will be distributed. Not even pouring rain could dampen the excitement of the crowd that gathered as one million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines arrived on the runway at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg on Monday. This marks the start of what experts are describing as the largest and most complex logistical vaccine undertaking in South Africa's history. Unlike other vaccines, however, which must be stored at temperatures of -70C, the Oxford vaccine which is produced by the Serum Institute of India, also known as Covishield, can be stored at normal fridge temperature which will help with the ease of distribution. The national government aims to vaccinate around 40 million people in coming months to establish herd or population immunity to protect South Africans from the novel coronavirus. Addressing the nation on Monday evening President Cyril Ramaphosa said this signifies a new chapter in South Africa's fight against the pandemic.

### **Here is who will get a Covid-19 vaccine in KwaZulu-Natal's first rollout phase**

*News24 | 2 February 2021*

KwaZulu-Natal will have 163 256 vaccines for health personnel from various sectors in the province in its first phase of rollout, Premier Sihle Zikalala said on Tuesday. "A total of 163 256 health personnel from various sectors in KwaZulu-Natal are eligible to receive vaccinations during the first phase, as announced by the president. These include 81 000 healthcare workers in the public sector and 49 000 in the private sector," he told media at the Public Works offices in Durban.

### **Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine is 91.6 per cent effective**

*Science Focus | 2 February 2021*

Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine is 91.6 per cent effective against symptomatic COVID-19, interim trial results suggest. No serious adverse events were deemed to be associated with vaccination, and most reported adverse events were mild, including flu-like symptoms, pain at the injection site and weakness or low energy. Interim data from the Phase 3 trial of the coronavirus vaccine from Russia, Gam-COVID-Vac (Sputnik V), suggests a two-dose regimen of the vaccine offers 91.6 per cent efficacy. The preliminary findings, published in *The Lancet*, are based on analysis of data from nearly 20,000 participants, three-quarters of whom received the vaccine and one quarter received a placebo.

### **Covid-19 vaccination registration opens for medics: Here's how it works**

*Times Live | 2 February 2021*

Less than 24 hours after the arrival of the first million Covid-19 vaccines on South African shores, the government's Electronic Vaccination Data System officially went online. President Cyril Ramaphosa on Monday said this system would be used to track who gets the vaccine and where. "The Department of

Health has developed an Electronic Vaccine Data System to streamline the vaccine registration and rollout process. This will allow us to capture all relevant data associated with the administration of the vaccine,” Ramaphosa said. “This system allows a person to make an appointment as soon as they qualify for a vaccination at the vaccine centre closest to them. The system will record vaccinations as they are administered,” he added. While the first rollout of the vaccine will be for front line health-care workers, the system still allows everyone — both locals and foreigners — to register their details. Registration, which takes about two minutes, can be done via any electronic device that has internet connection.

### **HIV prevention pill available at 36% of public healthcare facilities, says Health Department**

*News24 | 3 February 2021*

In February 2020, the National Department of Health told Spotlight that it aimed to make a pill to prevent HIV infection available at all community health centres and primary healthcare clinics in South Africa by end September 2020. With only 36% of public healthcare facilities providing the pills by January 2021, government has fallen short of this ambitious target. While government places most of the blame for this on the catastrophic impact of COVID-19, experts suggest there is more to it than just the pandemic

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## **TRAINING AND RESOURCES**

### **New free online course launched for doctors and medical students**

Although South Africa has a well-established Civil Registration and Vital Statistics system, the quality of mortality statistics obtained from the death notification forms completed by medical doctors is still suboptimal. We sought to address the lack of training of medical students and doctors on proper certification of cause of death by developing a free online training course based on the ICD principles of identifying the underlying cause of death, and compatible with the death notification form used in South Africa. We are happy to report that the online training tool has been completed and was recently launched: - [www.deathcertification.org](http://www.deathcertification.org).

### **SCORE global report on health data systems and capacity, 2020**

This World Health Organization report is the first ever global assessment of country data and health information systems capacity. It assesses countries according to five aspects of SCORE: Survey, Count, Optimize, Review and Enable. COVID-19 has created unprecedented demand for high-quality data and highlighted the need to address long-standing data gaps. Guided by countries, the report addresses gaps and inequalities in health information systems and provides recommendations for investment in areas that will have the greatest impact on the quality, availability, analysis, accessibility and use of data. Included on the report page is a link to the SCORE Online Data Portal and an accompanying Visual Summary. These will give you access to country-validated global, regional, and country-level SCORE assessments and key findings.

### **I-SHARE survey on the impact of Covid-19 on access to sexual and reproductive health in South Africa**

A team from the University of the Western Cape and Wits University are conducting a survey on the impact of Covid-19 on access to sexual and reproductive health in South Africa. The survey is being undertaken in 33 countries globally.

The survey link is found here: <https://linktr.ee/ISHARESouthAfrica>

### **EVDS Self-Registration App FAQ**

Who must register on the Electronic Vaccination Data System (EVDS), how should you register, and why?  
<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/evds/>

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## **PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS**

### **Global report on health data systems capacity, 2020**

WHO | 30 January 2021

The first global assessment on the status and capacity of health information systems in 133 countries, covering 87% of the global population. It identifies gaps and provides guidance for investment in areas that can have the greatest impact on the quality, availability, analysis, accessibility and use of health data.

### **Contract tracing in the context on Covid-19**

WHO | 1 February 2021

Contact tracing is a key strategy for interrupting chains of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and reducing COVID-19-associated mortality. This document provides updated guidance on how to establish contact tracing capacity for the control of COVID-19, and how to prioritize contact tracing activities in different settings.

### **PEPFAR Technical Guidance in Context of COVID-19 Pandemic**

PEPFAR | 3 February 2021

In January 2020, a novel coronavirus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), was identified as the causative agent of an outbreak of viral pneumonia centered in Wuhan, Hubei, China. The disease caused by this virus is called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The disease is now widespread, and every country in the world has reported cases. <https://who.sprinklr.com/>. PEPFAR continues to leverage its investments in USG personnel, implementing partners, and health infrastructure, including labs, health facilities, and supply chains as well as human resources for health for HIV and, as possible, for health security needs. PEPFAR has specifically and continually strengthened more than 3,000 laboratories, 28 national reference laboratories, 70,000 health care facilities, and over 290,000 health care workers – the vast majority in Sub-Saharan Africa. Partner countries have leveraged these robust health care delivery, data, diagnostic, surveillance, and pandemic response systems and capacities to swiftly and effectively prevent, detect, and respond to various other outbreaks, such as Ebola, avian flu, cholera, and COVID-19, while advancing HIV efforts. COVID-19 is the latest challenge, but PEPFAR investments ensure that pandemic preparedness capacities are resilient, responsive, and enduring for countries to sustain epidemic control of HIV.

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## **CONFERENCES AND EVENTS**

### **Invitation to Primary Health Care Research Consortium (PHCRC) webinar series: Scaling New Frontiers in Primary Health Care**

Continuing its webinar series Scaling New Frontiers in Primary Health Care Through Research and Partnership PHCRC is proud to announce Virtual Session 2: Primary Health Care Organisation and Models of Care scheduled for 17th February 2021 from 11:30 AM to 01:00 PM IST. This is an opportunity to listen and interact with an interesting line-up of discussants who have in-depth knowledge of primary health care in developing countries.

### **World Health Care Congress (WHCC21)**

The World Health Care Congress (WHCC21) is scheduled to take place April 11-14, 2021 at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, DC. Given the current circumstances and the impact of COVID-19, direction from Washington, DC officials, and information from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the health, safety, and well-being of our staff, speakers, attendees, sponsors, and partners is of utmost importance to us. Please continue to check back or [click here](#) to receive updates as they become available.

### **Society for Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes of South Africa Congress**

The 54th Congress of the Society for Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes of South Africa (SEMDSA) will be held at the Southern Sun Elangeni and Maharani in Durban from 26 - 28 March 2021. SEMDSA is open to all persons involved in Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes, and aims to improve clinical practice and promote clinical and scientific research into all branches of this field, for the well-being of people living with diabetes and related disorders. With the dramatic rise in the burden of diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease in South Africa over the past few decades, the organization has played a leading role in setting professional guidelines, maintaining academic training standards, providing guidance and advice on relevant policy, and promoting equal access to health services for all sectors of

society. To this end, the Organizing Committee has been working toward compiling a relevant, exciting and innovative program, with a host of dynamic local and international speakers. The program offers a unique opportunity for people with diabetes, health professionals and scientists to share their knowledge, experience and insight, present their research, and keep abreast of the latest developments in the field of Diabetes, Metabolism and Endocrinology.

### **The Annual Meeting for the Global Research Council**

The Annual Meeting for the Global Research Council (GRC) scheduled to take place in Durban, South Africa during 26-28 May 2020 has been postponed by one year. It will now take place 24-27 May 2021 also in Durban, South Africa. The co-hosts, the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa, and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), along with the GRC Governing Board, have agreed to postpone the event in response to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

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## **JOB OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) Unit: Area Co-Ordinator**

*Closing Date: 9 February 2021*

### **Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) Unit: Facility Team Leaders**

*Closing Date: 9 February 2021*

### **Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) Unit: Area Monitoring and Evaluation Officer**

*Closing Date: 9 February 2021*

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