



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

Coverage of maternal viral load monitoring during pregnancy in South Africa: Results from the 2019 national Antenatal HIV Sentinel Survey

HIV Medicine | 1 July 2021

Selamawit Woldesenbet, Tendesayi Kufa-Chakezha, Carl Lombard, Samuel Manda, Mireille Cheyip, et al.

South Africa has made remarkable progress in increasing the coverage of antiretroviral therapy (ART) among pregnant women; however, viral suppression among pregnant women receiving ART is reported to be low. Access to routine viral load testing is crucial to identify women with unsuppressed viral load early in pregnancy and to provide timely intervention to improve viral suppression. This study aimed to determine the coverage of maternal viral load monitoring nationally, focusing on viral load testing, documentation of viral load test results, and viral suppression (viral load < 50 copies/mL). At the time of this study, the first-line regimen for women initiating ART during pregnancy was non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase (NNRTI)-based regimen.

Identifying factors that nurses consider in the decision-making process related to patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic

Plos One | 2 July 2021

Nicholas Anton, Tera Hornbeck, Susan Modlin, Md Munirul Haque, Megan Crites, et al.

Nurse identification of patient deterioration is critical, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as patients can deteriorate quickly. While the literature has shown that nurses rely on intuition to make decisions, there is limited information on what sources of data experienced nurses utilize to inform their intuition. The objectives of this study were to identify sources of data that inform nurse decision-making related to recognition of deteriorating patients, and explore how COVID-19 has impacted nurse decision-making.

Unnatural deaths, alcohol bans and curfews: Evidence from a quasi-natural experiment during COVID-19

South African Medical Journal | 1 July 2021

T Moultrie, R Dorrington, R Laubscher, P Groenewald, C Parry, et al.

Background. Coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) restrictions, particularly relating to the sale of alcohol

and hours of curfew, have had a marked effect on the temporal pattern of unnatural deaths in South Africa. Death data were collected over 68 weeks from January 2020 to April 2021, together with information on the nature of restrictions (if any) on the sale of alcohol, and hours of curfew. Data were analysed using a simple ordinary least square (OLS) regression model to estimate the relative contribution of restrictions on the sale of alcohol and hours of curfew to the pattern of excess unnatural deaths.

7-1-7: an organising principle, target, and accountability metric to make the world safer from pandemics

The Lancet | 6 July 2021

Thomas Frieden, Christopher Lee, Aaron Bochner, Marine Buissonnière, Amanda McClelland

COVID-19 makes it both possible and necessary to review lessons learnt from recent epidemics, re-evaluate approaches, and develop a framework that accelerates progress to make the world safer from epidemics. Every country and every community must be able to rapidly detect, report, and respond effectively to any potential major new health threat. Notably, wide variation in capacities exist across countries. To improve early detection and rapid control of health threats, clear performance targets need to be set, cross-country variations need to be better quantified, factors responsible for these variations need to be identified, and speed and quality of detection and response need to be improved.

Women empowerment and skilled birth attendance in sub-Saharan Africa: A multi-country analysis

Plos One | 7 July 2021

Kwamena Dickson, Kenneth Adde, Edward Ameyaw

In 2017, the highest global maternal deaths occurred in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The WHO advocates that maternal deaths can be mitigated with the assistance of skilled birth attendants (SBAs) at childbirth. Women empowerment is also acknowledged as an enabling factor to women's functionality and healthcare utilisation including use of SBAs' services. Consequently, this study investigated the association between women empowerment and skilled birth attendance in SSA. This study involved the analysis of secondary data from the Demographic and Health Surveys of 29 countries conducted between January 1, 2010, and December 3, 2018. For this study, only women who had given birth in the five years prior to the surveys were included, which is 166,022. At 95% confidence interval, Binary Logistic Regression analyses were conducted and findings were presented as adjusted odds ratios (aORs).

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

RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

In-depth: How can we improve ventilation to prevent Covid-19 and TB?

News24 | 30 June 2021

Ventilation plays an important role in preventing the transmission of airborne disease but currently, ventilation standards for buildings are focused on preventing odours in spaces, instead of preventing disease transmission. Both Tuberculosis (TB) and Covid-19 can infect an individual via airborne transmission. A recent article published in the journal *Science* stressed the need for a drastic shift in how we view the role of ventilation in the transmission of disease globally. It states that ventilation standards, guidelines, and regulations that buildings should meet, should specify "minimum ventilation rates and other measures to provide an acceptable indoor air quality (IAQ) for most occupants". These requirements focus on controlling odour and "occupant generated bioeffluents" such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), as well as providing thermal comfort. "For decades, the focus of architects and building engineers was on thermal comfort, odor control, perceived air quality, initial investment cost, energy use, and other performance issues, whereas infection control was neglected," the authors write.

South Africa's vaccine quagmire, and what needs to be done now

Daily Maverick | 5 July 2021

South Africa's approach to its Covid-19 vaccine programme has been characterised by a large number of missteps. In aggregate it has left the country behind many others on the continent, and essentially left millions unvaccinated as a savage third wave descends on the country. This has happened despite an established vaccine procurement and distribution network, access to the first large batch of vaccines on

the continent, and a large number of pandemic and vaccine experts. As the country battles a severe third-wave crisis, at great cost to health, economy and society, the roll-out of a vaccine programme remains the only sustainable means to protect the population against Covid-19 severe disease and death and return to some level of acceptable economic activity. Strategically, therefore, policy needs to be hyper-focused on the delivery of a responsive vaccine programme to protect especially high-risk groups against severe disease and death. In this article, we outline the history of the vaccine strategy and its pitfalls. We also suggest a way forward.

Security sector vaccination programme rolls out with SAPS

SAnews | 5 July 2021

Government's COVID-19 vaccination programme reached a milestone on Monday, with government rolling out the inoculation of the security sector. Police Minister Bheki Cele and National Police General Khehla Sitole were the first to receive their jabs at the launch of the programme at the Orlando Stadium in Soweto, on Monday. The sector is the latest to join government's phased vaccination programme that started early this year. Healthcare workers were the first in March in the Johnson & Johnson Sisonke programme. A month later, government began administering jabs on the over 60 population. Two weeks ago, over 500 000 basic education workers began receiving their doses. Last week, the programme began focusing on those aged 50 and above. The launch of the security sector vaccination programme was part of government's tiered approach in an attempt to drive the country towards reaching herd immunity.

'Hello, my name is South Africa... we have a collective drinking problem': Alcohol bans had more impact than curfews, study finds

Daily Maverick | 5 July 2021

New research published in the SA Medical Journal (SAMJ) has found evidence that a ban on alcohol reduces the number of unnatural deaths related to trauma injuries while curfews have less of an impact. Prof Tom Moultrie, lead author and director of the University of Cape Town's Centre for Actuarial Research, says the findings show the weekly number of unnatural deaths (motor vehicle accidents, suicides and murders) was about 50% lower than expected during the Level 5 hard lockdown from March to May 2020, and was 26% lower than expected when the sale of alcohol was banned with curfews of between four and seven hours.

The next Covid-19 variant to watch like a hawk: the highly transmissible 'Lambda'

Times Live | 6 July 2021

SA is buckling under the weight of the Delta variant that has fuelled the Covid-19 third wave, but now another variant known as Lambda — and that's possibly even more transmissible — has surfaced. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Lambda variant was first detected in Peru but quickly spread to more than 30 countries, including Australia and the United Kingdom. The WHO has it pegged as a "variant of interest" — as opposed to a "variant of concern" — but this could change quickly as scientists are alarmed by its unusual mutations. Prof Barry Schoub, who heads the vaccine unit of the ministerial advisory committee on Covid-19, said on Tuesday night that Lambda "has not been detected in SA".

WHO recommends life-saving interleukin-6 receptor blockers for COVID-19 and urges producers to join efforts to rapidly increase access

The WHO | 6 July 2021

The World Health Organization (WHO) has updated its patient care guidelines to include interleukin-6 receptor blockers, a class of medicines that are lifesaving in patients who are severely or critically ill with COVID-19, especially when administered alongside corticosteroids. These were the findings from a prospective and a living network meta-analysis initiated by WHO, the largest such analysis on the drugs to date. Data from over 10 000 patients enrolled in 27 clinical trials were considered. These are the first drugs found to be effective against COVID-19 since corticosteroids were recommended by WHO in September 2020.

Healthcare in South Africa: how inequity is contributing to inefficiency

The Conversation | 6 July 2021

South Africa has a two-tiered, and highly unequal, healthcare system. The public sector is state-funded and caters to the majority – 71% – of the population. The private sector is largely funded through

individual contributions to medical aid schemes or health insurance, and serves around 27% of the population. The public sector is underfunded while most South Africans can't afford the exorbitant cost of private care. To balance the scales, the government tabled the National Health Insurance Scheme. The proposal was to provide universal healthcare by buying services from health professionals through a National Health Insurance Fund. These services would then be delivered at private and public facilities. But there are many unanswered questions about how exactly this scheme will work and many doubts about it. Russell Rensburg is the director of the Rural Health Advocacy Project, which champions equitable access to quality healthcare for the country's rural communities. He shares with The Conversation Africa how the gaps may be plugged.

Circumcisions cut as South Africa focuses on the battle against COVID-19

Health-E News | 7 July 2021

Government's move to direct all medical resources at the fight against COVID-19 has scuppered the hopes of many boys and men across the country who are waiting to undergo circumcision procedures. Boys and men in the Limpopo province, as well as across other parts of the country, who are wanting to undergo a circumcision procedure, either for cultural or medical reasons, or a combination of the two, will have to wait as South Africa's medical resources have been directed at battling the COVID-19 pandemic. For the second year running, authorities from both camps have placed circumcision rituals and male medical circumcision (MMC) procedures on hold.

Education Plus launched in response to alarming rates of HIV among adolescent girls and young women in Africa

Reliefweb | 7 July 2021

Five United Nations organizations have joined forces to launch a new initiative to ensure that all girls and boys in sub-Saharan Africa have equal access to free secondary education by 2025 and to contribute towards preventing HIV. Education Plus, launched at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris, France, is an ambitious five-year high-level drive to accelerate action and investments to expand access to secondary education for all young people and to advance adolescent girls' and young women's health, education and rights in sub-Saharan Africa. Before COVID-19 struck, around 34 million secondary school-aged girls in sub-Saharan Africa were being denied a full education and an estimated 24% of adolescent girls and young women (15–24 years) in the region were not in education, training or employed, compared to 14.6% of young men. One in four young people in sub-Saharan Africa aged 15–24 years are illiterate and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that in 2020 school closures due to COVID-19 impacted around 250 million students in the region, millions of whom may never return to the classroom.

Covid-19: Gauteng records deadliest week on record amid third wave driven by Delta variant – data

News24 | 8 July 2021

Gauteng has recorded its deadliest week on record amid a third wave of Covid-19 infections, driven by the Delta variant, with just more than 4 800 deaths from natural causes reported between 27 June and 3 July. In comparison, 15 334 deaths from all causes were reported nationally in the same week, with just more than 14 000 of those deaths from natural causes, according to estimates prepared by researchers at the South African Medical Research Council's Burden of Disease Research Unit (BDRU) and University of Cape Town's Centre for Actuarial Research (CARE).

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

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.

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

PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

South African Health Review 2021 – Call for Late-Breaker Abstracts

Health sector responses to COVID-19 in South Africa – The second and third waves

The editors of the 2021 edition of the South African Health Review (SAHR) recognise that there are ongoing developments with respect to South Africa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are however significant challenges in particular areas of the health systems response that still confront us, coupled with some emerging opportunities and forward thinking lessons for intervention. To ensure the special COVID-19 themed 2021 SAHR adequately covers contemporary issues, we are inviting further abstract submissions that cover research, perspectives and case studies.

Deadline: Monday, 26 July 2021

SA COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 05 July 2021, Report 8

This is a weekly report of COVID & vaccine concerns, rumours and misinformation in SA prepared by the RCCE Social Listening. We aim to hear voices throughout South Africa (note on methodology & collaboration below).

UN High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS 2021: HIVPL Data and Analysis on the 10-10-10 Targets

HIV Policy Lab | 1 June 2021

At the High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS (June 8-10, 2021), UN member states will recommit to the goal of ending AIDS by 2030. The Political Declaration is expected to recognize the central role that inequalities, stigma and discrimination, and violence play in fueling the HIV pandemic and the necessity of reforming laws and policies that drive discrimination and undermine access to HIV prevention and treatment. The Political Declaration follows on UNAIDS' release of the Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026: End Inequalities. End AIDS. At the core of the strategy, an ambitious new set of targets, the 10-10-10 targets, call on countries to repeal punitive laws/policies that target key populations and to implement supportive laws/policies that combat stigma, discrimination, and gender-based violence.

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

CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Webinar: Cancer Patients and COVID-19 Vaccination

Date: 13 July 2021

Time: 12:00

CANSA invites you to a webinar session about cancer patients and the COVID vaccine. Our panel of presenters include two oncology experts sharing current recommendations and information, Dr Zainab Mohamed, Head Clinical Unit, Radiation Oncology Groote Schuur Hospital / University of Cape Town and Dr Ria David, a medical oncologist and specialist physician from Oncocare. The session is open to everyone affected by cancer, including newly diagnosed people starting their cancer treatment journey, cancer survivors and those who in remission. Cancer patients and survivors have vulnerable immune systems and need to be protected. The webinar will be facilitated by Dr Brenda Kubheka from Clinic Health Group and Health IQ Consulting. Also joining the panel is Dr Vicki Pinkney-Atkinson, Director of the South African Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance (SANCDA), a strong advocate for people living with non-communicable diseases.

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

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The Health Systems Trust currently has no available jobs.

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



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