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ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Financial incentives for smoking cessation in pregnancy: multicentre randomised controlled trial

The BMJ | 1 December 2021

Ivan Berlin, Noémi Berlin, Marie Malecot, Martine Breton, Florence Jusot, et al.

Maternal smoking during pregnancy is an avoidable risk factor for negative pregnancy and birth outcomes and could have negative health effects on children who are exposed in utero to tobacco smoking. Smoking cessation is critical in preventing smoking associated risks in pregnancy and negative birth outcomes. The US Preventive Services Task Force concluded that the benefit of behavioural interventions for smoking cessation is substantial but that the evidence of the benefit and harm of pharmacotherapy interventions is insufficient. In a recent Cochrane review, nicotine replacement therapy was found to increase smoking cessation rates in late pregnancy, but this evidence is of low certainty as the effect was not found when non-placebo controlled randomised controlled trials were excluded from the analysis. Evidence that nicotine replacement therapy has an impact on birth outcomes, particularly on birth weight, is lacking. New treatment options should be researched to help pregnant smokers quit.

The effect of providing women sustained access to HIV self-tests on male partner testing, couples testing, and HIV incidence in Kenya: a cluster-randomised trial

The Lancet HIV | 1 December 2021

Harsha Thirumurthy, Elizabeth Bair, Perez Ochwal, Noora Marcus, Prof Mary Putt, Prof Suzanne Maman, et al

HIV self-testing can overcome barriers to HIV testing, but its potential as an HIV prevention strategy for women in sub-Saharan Africa has not been assessed. We examined whether sustained provision of self-tests to women promotes testing among sexual partners and reduces HIV incidence.

Ranking lifestyle risk factors for cervical cancer among Black women: A case-control study from Johannesburg, South Africa

PLOS ONE | 10 December 2021

Mwiza Singini, Freddy Sitas, Debbie Bradshaw, Wenlong Chen, Melitah Motlhale, et al.

Aside from human papillomavirus (HPV), the role of other risk factors in cervical cancer such as age,

education, parity, sexual partners, smoking and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) have been described but never ranked in order of priority. We evaluated the contribution of several known lifestyle co-risk factors for cervical cancer among black South African women.

Incidence and predictors of mortality among persons receiving second-line tuberculosis treatment in sub-Saharan Africa: A meta-analysis of 43 cohort studies

PLOS ONE | 11 December 2021

Dumessa Edessa, Fuad Adem, Bisrat Hagos, Mekonnen Sisay

Drug resistance remains from among the most feared public health threats that commonly challenges tuberculosis treatment success. Since 2010, there have been rapid evolution and advances to second-line anti-tuberculosis treatments (SLD). However, evidence on impacts of these advances on incidence of mortality are scarce and conflicting. Estimating the number of people died from any cause during the follow-up period of SLD as the incidence proportion of all-cause mortality is the most informative way of appraising the drug-resistant tuberculosis treatment outcome. We thus aimed to estimate the pooled incidence of mortality and its predictors among persons receiving the SLD in sub-Saharan Africa.

COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaxxers – supporting healthcare workers to navigate the unvaccinated: Reflections from clinical practice

South African Medical Journal | 13 December 2021

J Hoare, M Mendelson, L Frenkel

An important step in preparation for the fourth COVID-19 wave is to provide healthcare workers (HCWs) with skills to facilitate behaviour change in vaccine-hesitant patients. Convincing members of the public who are vaccine hesitant rather than anti-vaxxers should be the focus of our efforts. Our experience is that vaccine-hesitant individuals and anti-vaxxers are generally distinct cohorts, with differing reasons for their vaccine reluctance. If we are to truly address hesitancy, we must take time to understand the reasons for an individual's hesitancy. Developing a conceptual framework and skills for HCWs during encounters with unvaccinated individuals will be important not only for shifting some to get vaccinated, but also to manage the complex emotions that HCWs will undoubtedly be forced to confront during the fourth wave.

Preventing violence against women: beyond 16 days

The Lancet | 11 December 2021

Editorial

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, an annual, global civil society campaign calling for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls, ended on Dec 10. This year, the 30th anniversary of the event, carries particular poignancy. Violence against women and girls, already at high levels before COVID-19, has risen markedly during the pandemic and increased in severity, according to Oxfam. Government responses to the pandemic included lockdowns, suspension of social services, and economic hardship, many of which had the consequences of placing women at increased risk of violence, while in many countries, financial and logistical support for violence response services was withdrawn. Violence against women has received a tiny fraction of the attention and funding of the COVID-19 pandemic response, despite the efforts of campaigners.

Cost-effectiveness of testing for latent tuberculosis infection in people with HIV

AIDS | 1 January 2022

P Auguste, H Mistry, N McCarthy, D Noel, P Sutcliffe et al

The aim of this study was to estimate the cost-effectiveness of screening strategies for predicting LTBI that progresses to active tuberculosis (TB) in people with HIV.

The interplay between HIV and COVID-19: summary of the data and responses to date

Current Opinion in HIV and AIDS | January 2021

L Brown, Spinelli Matthew A and M Gandhi

We examine the interplay between the HIV and COVID-19 epidemics, including the impact of HIV on COVID-19 susceptibility and severe disease, the effect of the COVID-19 epidemic on HIV prevention and treatment, and the influence of the HIV epidemic on responses to COVID-19. Evidence to date does not suggest that people living with HIV (PLWH) have a markedly higher susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection, with disparities in the social determinants of health and comorbidities likely having a greater

influence. The majority of literature has not supported a higher risk for severe disease among PLWH in Europe and the United States, although a large, population-based study in South Africa reported a higher rate of death due to COVID-19. Higher rates of comorbidities associated with COVID-19 disease severity among PLWH is an urgent concern. COVID-19 is leading to decreased access to HIV prevention services and HIV testing, and worsening HIV treatment access and virologic suppression, which could lead to worsening HIV epidemic control.

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RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

In-Depth: Hypertension – South Africa's “silent killer”

Spotlight | 6 December 2021

High blood pressure (hypertension) is the leading cause of heart disease and premature death worldwide, according to an article in *Nature*. While it is not specifically listed on the World Health Organization's list of top 10 causes of death, it is an underlying cause of heart disease and stroke, both of which are on the list. Yet many people are unaware they have the condition.

Omicron is sneaky. It could be fatal for us – or for our faith in government

The Guardian | 12 December 2021

The emergence and rapid spread of the Omicron Sars-CoV-2 variant feels like a flashback to last year's grim festive season when much of the world went into lockdown to avert the worst of the Alpha variant wave. But though the sense of eerie, impending doom feels familiar, the epidemiological and political situations are different from one year ago. The Omicron wave represents a key turning point in the pandemic. But no plausible outcome looks particularly auspicious – it feels largely like a lose-lose deal. If it turns out to be roughly as severe as previous pandemic waves, it might normalise harsh mitigation measures and render the prospect of a return to post-pandemic normality fairly remote. If it turned out to be milder than feared, this could spell the end of lockdowns with Covid-19 on its way into endemicity. The cost would be a loss of trust in political and public health authorities, which may make it difficult to deal with future threats

More than half a billion people pushed or pushed further into extreme poverty due to health care costs

WHO | 12 December 2021

New evidence compiled by the World Health Organization and the World Bank shows that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to halt two decades of global progress towards Universal Health Coverage. The organizations also reveal that already before the pandemic more than half a billion people were pushed or further pushed into extreme poverty because they have to pay for health services out of their own pockets, and that the pandemic is likely to make the situation worse. The findings are contained in two complementary reports, launched on Universal Health Coverage Day, highlighting the devastating impact of COVID-19 on people's ability to obtain health care and pay for it. In 2020, the pandemic disrupted health services and stretched countries' health systems beyond their limits as they struggled to deal with the impact of COVID-19. As a result, for example, immunization coverage dropped for the first time in ten years, and deaths from TB and malaria increased.

Addressing inequalities to ensure health and rights for all

UNAIDS | 12 December 2021

Statement by Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS, on the occasion of Universal Health Coverage Day

As we commemorate Universal Health Coverage Day 2021, the world is entering year three of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has reminded us that no one is safe until everyone is safe. It shows how pandemics expose intersecting inequalities among people, countries and communities. Universal health coverage means that all individuals and communities can access the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. But with at least half the world's population lacking access to essential health services even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there is much work to do.

Cost of PCR Tests Reduced Because of Better Technology - Competition

Commission

EWN | 13 December 2021

The Competition Commission said the cost reduction of PCR tests is due to advancing technologies in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. In the private sector the tests are now R500, which came into immediate effect on Sunday. The commission made the announcement on Sunday, stating it had reached an agreement with major laboratories.

Putting medical professionals' mental wellness under the microscope

Health-E News | 13 December 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of the alarming prevalence of mental, neurological and psychosocial disorders and the importance of giving them appropriate attention, especially for medical professionals. Globally, more than 300 million people of all ages suffer from depression, which remains a major contributor to the overall global burden of disease.

Omicron detected in City's wastewater

IOL | 13 December 2021

The Omicron variant has been found in the City's wastewater. Scientists from the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) have detected the variant in wastewater samples collected in the City of Cape Town and the Nelson Mandela Bay. They said 92% of the samples taken showed the presence of Omicron. Director of the SAMRC's Genomics Centre Craig Kinnear said those with Covid-19 are known to shed the viral remains in their faeces.

Covid Omicron variant found in 63 countries, might surpass Delta: WHO

Business Standard | 13 December 2021

As per the World Health Organization (WHO), the new Omicron coronavirus strain found in 63 countries will surpass Delta in spreading speed. "As of December 9, 2021, cases of human infections with this variant have been identified in 63 countries across all six WHO regions," read the overview by the WHO, reported Sputnik. It is not clear yet, why the new strain is spreading so fast, the organization added.

Investing 1 dollar per person per year could save 7 million lives in low- and lower-middle-income countries

WHO | 13 December 2021

A new WHO report shows that close to 7 million deaths could be prevented by 2030 if low- and lower-middle-income countries were to make an additional investment of less than a dollar per person per year in the prevention and treatment of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). NCDs – including heart disease, diabetes, cancer and respiratory disease – currently cause 7 out of every 10 deaths around the world. Yet their impact on lower income countries is often underestimated, despite the fact that 85% of premature deaths (between ages 30–69) from NCDs occur in low- and middle-income countries, making them a huge health and socioeconomic burden. The vast majority of those deaths can be prevented using WHO's tried and tested NCD Best Buy interventions. These include cost effective measures to reduce tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol, improve diets, increase physical activity, reduce risks from cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, and prevent cervical cancer. Keeping people healthy reduces health costs, increases productivity and leads to longer and healthier lives.

WHO and St. Jude to dramatically increase global access to childhood cancer medicines

WHO | 13 December 2021

The World Health Organization and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital today announced plans to establish a platform that will dramatically increase access to childhood cancer medicines around the world. The Global Platform for Access to Childhood Cancer Medicines, the first of its kind, will provide an uninterrupted supply of quality-assured childhood cancer medicines to low- and middle-income countries. St. Jude is making a six-year, US\$ 200 million investment to launch the platform, which will provide medicines at no cost to countries participating in the pilot phase. This is the largest financial commitment for a global effort in childhood cancer medicines to date.

Protect the environment, World No Tobacco Day 2022 will give you one more reason to quit

WHO | 13 December 2021

WHO today announces the 2022 global campaign for World No Tobacco Day - "Tobacco: Threat to our environment". The campaign is aimed to raise awareness among the public on the environmental impact of tobacco – from cultivation, production, distribution and waste. It will give tobacco users one extra reason to quit. The campaign will also aim to expose tobacco industry's effort to "greenwash" its reputation and products by marketing themselves as environmentally friendly.

Tackling corruption, important step for 'inclusive, sustainable development'

United Nations | 13 December 2021

Corruption deepens inequalities, feeds cynicism and reinforces obstacles facing women and girls, according to the UN chief who maintained that tackling it is "an important step towards inclusive, sustainable development". He described the conference as an opportunity to strengthen cooperation and accelerate global action against corruption. "Let us revive hope and restore trust in institutions...now is the time to act for a safer, more prosperous and just future", spelled out the Secretary-General.

Cannabis: Smokers face poorer educational outcomes

Health-E News | 14 December 2021

Young South Africans face a myriad of challenges daily with mental health issues at the forefront. Although turning to cannabis is now legal, studies show that lighting up a joint as an escape from everyday stress could result in poorer educational outcomes, writes Kagiso Keipopele. Health-e News spoke to a few students during end-of-year exam time to find out about how they use cannabis to treat symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Can I test positive for Covid-19 if I have been vaccinated?

Times Live | 14 December 2021

President Cyril Ramaphosa testing positive for Covid-19 has sparked a debate on social media, with many questioning how fully vaccinated people are still contracting the virus. On Sunday, the presidency announced that Ramaphosa was receiving treatment for mild symptoms. Ramaphosa, who is fully vaccinated, started feeling unwell after leaving the state memorial service in honour of former deputy president FW de Klerk in Cape Town. He is currently in self-isolation in the city. On social media many questioned how Ramaphosa contracted Covid-19 when he is vaccinated against the virus. The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has defined contracting Covid-19 after being fully vaccinated as a "vaccine breakthrough infection".

Holidaymakers urged to wear masks as thousands converge on Durban beaches

News 24 | 14 December 2021

As the country recorded 37 875 new cases of Covid-19 on Sunday, beachgoers have been told to mask up and adhere to Covid-19 regulations. Thousands of unmasked sand and surf-lovers have been seen daily on Durban beaches since the start of December. This, despite KwaZulu-Natal having entered the fourth wave of Covid-19 infections last week with numbers rising sharply every day. KZN had 22 486 active cases according to data from the department of health.

A tale of two mothers: Inside the losses of South Africa's femicide epidemic

Bhekisisa | 13 December 2021

Over half of all women killed in South Africa are murdered by their partners. Here are stories from two mothers who lost children to gender-based violence in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga — and what could have been done to prevent this abuse.

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TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Subscribe to the Health Systems Trust Bulletin

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.

Subscribe to the Health Systems Trust 60percent

HST produces a weekly online publication, 60percent, which keeps subscribers abreast with the latest news and developments pertaining to HIV-related maternal, adolescent, child and youth health. The name 60percent signifies that southern Africa is responding to a feminised HIV/AIDS epidemic, with at least 60% of those living with HIV being women. Subscribe to 60percent by simply visiting HST's website (<https://www.hst.org.za>), scroll to the bottom of the page, hit the SUBSCRIBE button, and follow the prompts. Let's keep you posted!

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.

HSR 2022: Call for Abstracts!

HSG is pleased to invite abstract submissions for the 7th Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR2022), to be held in Bogota, Colombia October 31 – November 4, 2022. Read below for theme details, field building requirements, and submission guidelines.

Theme: Systems Performance in the Political Agenda: Sharing lessons for current and future global challenges.

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PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

South African Health Review: COVID-19, What have we learnt? – Forthcoming

Health Systems Trust

The Health Systems Trust, in collaboration with the Health Economics and AIDS Research Division (HEARD), a unit of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, are proud to release the key findings of the 2021 edition of the South African Health Review. This special edition, entitled, COVID-19, what have we learnt? documents the South African health sector's response to COVID-19; provides examples of innovations, best practises, and collaboration; and assesses the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations. Overall, the publication is a repository of valuable information, including lessons for developing resilient health systems capable of responding to public health emergencies. The publication's contents cover a wide range of topics, from assessing the government's response to COVID-19 and efforts to balance lives and livelihoods, to investigating the impact of COVID-19 on human resources for health and vulnerable populations, and documenting good practises and promising innovations.

To access the Chapters at a Glance please click here:

Tracking universal health coverage: 2021 Global Monitoring Report

World Health Organization

Health is a fundamental human right, and universal health coverage (UHC) is critical for achieving that right. UHC represents the aspiration that good quality health services should be received by everyone, when and where needed, without incurring financial hardship. This ambition was clearly stated as a target in the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and reaffirmed when world leaders endorsed the Political Declaration of the United Nations High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage in September 2019, the most comprehensive international health agreement in history. Beyond health and wellbeing, UHC also contributes to social inclusion, gender equality, poverty eradication, economic growth and human dignity. This report reveals that pre-pandemic, gains in service coverage were substantial and driven by a massive scaling up of interventions to tackle communicable diseases, such as HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. And while impoverishing health spending has decreased in recent years, the number of people impoverished or further impoverished by out of pocket health spending has remained unacceptably high. These trends are exacerbated by substantial and persistent inequalities between and within countries.

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Webinar: Disinfection using Ultraviolet Radiation

Date: 17 December 2021

Time: 13:00 – 14:00 CET

The ability of ultraviolet radiation to disinfect water, surfaces and air has been known for over a hundred years. In the last few decades, the primary application across the world has been water disinfection, but it has also matured as a means of disinfection in healthcare and other environments. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the potential for UV radiation to manage the transmission of the disease, both using well-developed technologies and emerging technologies. Dr Ed Nardell will provide an overview of the application of UV for disinfection for a range of pathogens and environments. Dr Ewan Eadie and Dr Kenny Wood will describe their research on the application of 222 nm UV excimer lamps for area disinfection.

Register here: https://who.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_gsM4fuKQRtShaEeBMon2xw

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING: Pharmacist

Closing Date: 15 December 2021

HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING: Facility Team Leaders (2)

Closing Date: 17 December 2021

Chief Human Resources Officer / Head of Human Resources

Closing Date: 16 January 2022

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