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ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Immunogenicity and safety of a SARS-CoV-2 recombinant spike protein nanoparticle vaccine in people living with and without HIV-1 infection: a randomised, controlled, phase 2A/2B trial

The Lancet HIV | May 2022

Madhi, Moodley, Hanleyh, Archary, Hoosain, et al.

Globally, 37.7 million people are living with HIV-1, two-thirds of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa and 73% of whom are on antiretroviral therapy (ART). Underlying HIV-1 infection is a risk factor for severe disease due to respiratory pathogens, such as seasonal influenza virus and *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, even when treated with ART. There are conflicting data on whether people living with HIV-1 are at increased risk of developing COVID-19 after SARS-CoV-2 infection. However, underlying HIV-1 infection is a risk factor for fatal outcome following hospitalisation with COVID-19, particularly in patients with a history of severe immunosuppression. About 61.5% of the global population has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine as of Nov 10, 2021, but less than 10.4% of people living in low-income countries have been vaccinated. Several COVID-19 vaccine efficacy trials have enabled emergency use authorisation, but there is a paucity of data on the safety, immunogenicity, and efficacy of non-replicating adenovirus vector, mRNA, inactivated virus, or protein-based COVID-19 vaccines in people living with HIV-1.

Determining HIV risk for Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) in relationships with “Blessers” and age-disparate partners: a cross-sectional survey in four districts in South Africa

BMC Public Health | 14 May 2022

George, Beckett, Reddy, Govender, Cawood, et al.

HIV incidence among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) remains high, with their male partners a prominent factor in sustaining these elevated rates. Partnership characteristics remain important metrics for determining HIV risk, with evidence indicating that AGYW engaged in transactional and age-disparate relationships face greater HIV exposure. This study examines the risk posed to AGYW in a relationship with a “Blesser”, defined as male who provides his female partner with their material needs or desires in exchange for a sexual relationship, an age-disparate (5 or more years older) partner, and the potential compounded risk of being a relationship with a partner or partners who are considered both a “Blesser”

and age-disparate.

Feasibility of using telephone interviews and internet-based message services during the COVID-19 pandemic in rural Sri Lanka: experiences of the Rajarata Pregnancy Cohort

Remote and Rural Health | 16 May 2022

*Imasha Jayasinghe, Yashodha Wickramasingh, Dilanka Melani Kurera, Nisansala Samarakoon, **Ishani Rupasinghe**, et al.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged population health researchers to use remote data collection methods to avoid face-to-face interaction. A proper assessment of the feasibility of these methods in low-resource settings is lacking. We share our experience from telephone interviews conducted among pregnant women in the Rajarata Pregnancy Cohort in Sri Lanka. Among 3374 participants, 3284 (98.4%) and 496 (14.7%) had mobile and fixed-access phones respectively. During interviews, 1576 (51.9%) of participants were non-contactable. Of these, there were 157 (5.1%) wrong numbers, 889 (29.1%) were unavailable/phone switched off and 479 (15.7%) didn't answer their phone. Telephone interviews were completed only among 1438 (42.6%). Of these, 476 (33.1%) used messaging apps. In this local setting, these methods led to selection bias and inequity in health message delivery. If other ways to target vulnerable people in rural areas are not in place, the adoption of a telephone-based strategy to health message delivery may worsen health disparity during the COVID-19 pandemic. These facts aid in the planning and implementation of research and health promotion initiatives in rural areas of low- and middle-income nations throughout the world.

Clinical severity of COVID-19 in patients admitted to hospital during the omicron wave in South Africa: a retrospective observational study

The Lancet | 18 May 2022

Jassat, Abdool Karim, Mudara, Welch, Ozougwu, et al.

Up to the end of January, 2022, South Africa has had four recognisable COVID-19 pandemic waves, each predominantly dominated by one variant of concern: the ancestral strain with an Asp614Gly mutation during the first wave, the beta variant (B.1.351) during the second wave, the delta variant (B.1.617.2) during the third wave, and lastly, the omicron variant (B.1.1.529) during the fourth wave. We aimed to assess the clinical disease severity of patients admitted to hospital with SARS-CoV-2 infection during the omicron wave and compare the findings with those of the preceding three pandemic waves in South Africa.

Tracking adverse drug reactions and medication errors in the Central Chronic Medicine Dispensing and Distribution (CCMDD) programme in South Africa

South African Journal of HIV Medicine | 19 May 2022

Kennedy Otwombe, Maggie Munsamy, Mukesh Dheda, Nishana Ramdas, Corlee Herbst, Merlin Pillay, Tanya van Tonder, Celia Serenata, Samanta Lalla-Edward

The South African Central Chronic Medicine Dispensing and Distribution (CCMDD) programme is a National Health Insurance (NHI) initiative that improves access to medicine for patients. Objectives: To describe the frequency of adverse drug reactions (ADRs) and medication errors reported in stable patients living with HIV. Method: This descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted from August 2020 to October 2020, targeting tenofovir disoproxil fumarate/lamivudine/dolutegravir (TLD) and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate/emtricitabine/efavirenz (TEE) patients. The distribution of ADRs and medication errors is presented.

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RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

HST salutes society's unsung heroes, nurses

Health Systems Trust | 13 May 2022

In the spirit of Ubuntu and full recognition of their commitment and dedication to saving the lives of others, the Health Systems Trust (HST) would like to say to nurses all over the world, thank you! The global community observes International Nurses Day annually on 12 May, a day commemorating the anniversary

of Florence Nightingale's birth (1820-1910). This world icon's work and training of nurses helped transform hospitals from death houses to sanctuaries of care. This year, representatives from HST's Communications Unit and SA SURE Project spent the day visiting nurses from five clinics based in some of eThekweni's communities hardest hit by the recent floods to hear the voices of nurses employed in the organisation and try to fathom how they continue to shine, despite the recent crises, disasters and pandemics that have shaken KwaZulu-Natal.

World Bank calls for investment in health workforce if SA serious about caring for its people

Daily Maverick | 15 May 2022

A new study by a team from the World Bank finds that to adequately care for the health of its future population, South Africa will have to substantially invest in a skilled health workforce. The country's increasing population, changing demographics and growing middle class are just a few of the trends that will put pressure on South Africa's health system in the coming decades. By 2050, South Africa is expected to grow by 15 million people, and about 77% of the population will be living in cities. Economic growth will help expand the middle class, especially in urban areas, and poverty is expected to be reduced to about 30% by 2030. At the same time, South Africa's life expectancy is projected to increase from the current 64 to about 73 years in 2040, if HIV/Aids can be controlled. Due to out-migration of the youth, many rural people will be both poor and elderly and will be facing chronic diseases, which are increasingly affecting the poor.

Countries with lower-than-expected vaccination rates show unusually negative attitudes to vaccines on Twitter

Health 24 | 16 May 2022

In countries with lower-than-expected Covid-19 vaccination rates, mentions of side effects and negative emotions dominated overall social media discourses on Covid-19 vaccines, according to our new research published in the journal *Vaccines*. Our team wanted to understand whether the tone of social media conversations around the world matched differing country-level vaccination rates. To do this, we analyzed more than 21.3 million tweets in 33 languages from 192 countries posted between November 2020 and August 2021, searching any tweet that mentioned "Covid-19" and "vaccine" or "vaccination." We then calculated percentages of these tweets that mentioned keywords signifying adverse events of vaccination, such as side effects, blood clots or death.

COVID, skin contact & kangaroos: How SA's hospital rules are adapting

Bhekisisa | 16 May 2022

COVID-19 has had a direct impact on maternal mortality. Pregnant women are not at an increased risk of becoming infected with SARS-CoV-2. But data shows they are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 disease. This is especially the case in the last 12 weeks of pregnancy, and this is still the case two years into the pandemic. In South Africa, this risk equated to an additional 16 COVID-19-related maternal deaths per 100 000 live births, compared to maternal deaths in uninfected women. This mortality rate is similar to that of disorders related to high blood pressure in pregnancy. As in other populations, pregnant women with high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity are at higher risk of severe COVID-19. The indirect effects of the pandemic have been equally devastating.

Assistive technology: a 'life changer' for those most in need

UN News | 16 May 2022

Produced jointly by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), The Global Report on Assistive Technology presents new evidence of the global need for - and access to - tech that can make a fundamental difference. "Assistive technology is a life changer - it opens the door to education for children with impairments, employment and social interaction for adults living with disabilities, and an independent life of dignity for older persons," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Your Covid-19 questions answered: What is post-Covid syndrome?

Times Live | 16 May 2022

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says there are adults and children who experience post-Covid syndrome after infection with the coronavirus. This means developing symptoms long after recovery from

the virus. The organisation's chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan said symptoms of post-Covid syndrome include fatigue and headaches. She said these symptoms can persist for weeks, and in some cases months. Swaminathan was speaking about the importance of vaccination for children who are eligible for the jab. She said the organisation recommends the vaccination of children above the age of five years.

We need a definitive exit from our Covid-19 pandemic. Here's the roadmap

The Guardian | 16 May 2022

As the virus accelerates its evolution, the humans capitulate. For two and a half years, Covid-19 has been outrunning our response, getting more and more transmissible, reaching a level of infectiousness that few pathogens have ever attained. Instead of taking a stance of getting ahead of the virus, and outsmarting it, people have succumbed.

Global Fund donates to fight HIV/Aids, tuberculosis, and malaria

Health-E News | 16 May 2022

The Global Fund has donated R8.8-billion to South Africa to fight HIV/Aids, tuberculosis, and malaria (Video: <https://health-e.org.za/2022/05/16/global-fund-donates-to-fight-hiv-aids-tuberculosis-and-malaria/>)

Lubricant helps prevent HIV infection, but access remains limited

Spotlight | 17 May 2022

The National Department of Health says that lubricant should be freely available alongside condoms at clinics around the country. But according to community-led monitoring group Ritshidze, clinics often do not offer lubricant. Biénne Huisman reports on why access to lubricant is important for HIV prevention and why oil-based lubricants should not be used with condoms.

No severance pay for employee who refused Covid vaccination

Groundup | 17 May 2022

A long-term employee who was retrenched because she refused to get a Covid vaccination was not entitled to a severance package, the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) has ruled. Commissioner Piet van Staden, in his recent ruling, said the termination of the services of Cecilia Bessick by Baroque Medical, a supplier of medical equipment, was both substantively and procedurally fair. Her decision not to adhere to the employer's mandatory vaccination policy was "unreasonable", he said, ruling that she was not entitled to any severance pay. Bessick had complained that she had been unfairly retrenched and the company had not adequately considered alternatives. At the time, she was 64 years old, nearing retirement, and had worked at the company as an invoicing clerk for 22 years. She and three others, who elected not to abide by the compulsory vaccination policy, were all retrenched.

Hypertension, the 'silent killer': Top tips to help you get an accurate blood pressure reading

News 24 | 17 May 2022

You may have hypertension, or high blood pressure, and not even know it. The disease, often called the "silent killer" – because the person may not have any noticeable symptoms – is common among both young and older people. A study highlights that it affects one in eight adults between 20 and 40 years of age. If left unchecked and untreated, it can lead to a large number of serious problems, including heart attack, stroke, and kidney and brain damage. In South Africa, 46% of women and 44% of men aged 15 years and older have hypertension. Globally, this figure is 1.28 billion adults. While there is no cure, certain medications and lifestyle changes can lead to a dramatic improvement – yet 700 million people are living without treatment.

World Hypertension Day: The 'silent killer' an underlying cause of COVID-19 deaths

Health-E News | 17 May 2022

Hypertension is simple to prevent, simple to diagnose, and simple to treat but according to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, one in three South Africans live with the condition. The CEO of the South African chapter of the foundation Professor Pamela Naidoo said high blood pressure is responsible for 1 in every 2 strokes and 2 in every 5 heart attacks. "High blood pressure is known as a 'silent killer' because there are rarely any symptoms or visible signs to warn that blood pressure is high. That is why more than 50%

of people with high blood pressure are unaware of their condition,” said Naidoo.

Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly to focus on “Health for Peace, Peace for Health” for recovery and renewal

World Health Organization | 17 May 2022

In a world threatened by conflict, inequities, the climate crisis and pandemics, the Seventy-fifth session of the World Health Assembly will stress the importance of building a healthy and peaceful planet by harnessing science, data, technology and innovation. This year’s session of the Health Assembly will focus on the theme of “Health for Peace, Peace for Health” and will run from the 22-28 May at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. It will include the appointment of the next WHO Director-General. “The pandemic has undermined progress towards the health-related targets in Sustainable Development Goals and laid bare inequities within and between countries,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “Sustained recovery will require more than ‘getting back on track’ and reinvesting in existing services and systems. We need a new approach, which means shifting priorities and focusing on the highest-impact interventions.” The Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly will kick off with a high-level segment on 22 May with speeches from the elected Health Assembly President, Heads of State, special guests, an address by the WHO Director-General and the presentation of the Director-General’s Health Awards. The Director-General’s speech will set out WHO’s five priorities going forward, expanding from the vision delivered at the Executive Board meeting held in January 2022.

SA’s visionary research leads to new WHO guidelines for improved TB treatment

News24 | 18 May 2022

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has announced key changes to the way drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB) will be treated after a discovery by researchers from Wits University. This is a significant development that will greatly benefit patients with DR-TB in South Africa and around the world. The changes include that the treatment time will be cut down from 18 months to six months, the number of pills will be reduced from 23 a day to 23 a week, painful injections will be eliminated and side effects will be significantly reduced.

Incentivizing collaboration towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goals

World Health Organization | 18 May 2022

Ahead of the 75th World Health Assembly, the 13 signatory agencies of the *Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All (SDG3 GAP)* have released their third progress report, ***Stronger collaboration for an equitable and resilient recovery towards the health-related SDGs, incentivizing collaboration***. The report notes that, more than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by overlapping global crises, progress on the health-related SDGs is further off track. Countries have achieved about one-fourth of what is needed to achieve the SDG health targets by 2030. It also highlights the need for the SDG3 Global Action Plan, with its focus on improving collaboration to help accelerate SDG implementation by countries. The report gives examples of how new, more joined-up ways of working are having an impact on people’s health, and outlines ways to further improve this, for example through creating more incentives for agencies to work more closely together.

Nanomedicine and HIV Therapeutics

AZO NANO | 18 May 2022

While antiretrovirals have improved the types of therapy available for patients, the ineffective requirement of lifetime treatment, as well as the development of resistance, is a major hurdle. However, the emergence and growth of nanotechnology may be a promising solution for a higher level of effective treatment as well as prevention of both HIV and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

World AIDS Vaccine Day 2022: History, Significance and Theme

News18 | 18 May 2022

World AIDS Vaccine Day: The day highlights the urgent need for a vaccine that might prevent Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome from the human immunodeficiency virus

What the latest Covid-19 stats can tell us - and what they can’t

Health24 | 18 May 2022

If we go by the sheer number of new, laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infections, and use the formula the ministerial advisory committee (MAC) used in previous surges to calculate if a new Covid-19 wave had started, South Africa moved into a fifth Covid wave on May 7. But not all scientists agree that we're in a fifth wave per se - or that it matters that much. The MAC formula says when the seven-day moving average of new cases exceeds 30% of the peak of the previous wave, we're in a new wave. The seven-day moving average is when you add up the seven past days of new cases, divide them by seven (so you get the average number of cases) and repeat that calculation for each new day so you can plot all the seven-day averages on a graph. Because there would be a new seven-day average for each day, it's called a "moving" average.

Covid-19 SA: Vaccines safe for pregnant and breastfeeding

Health-E News | 18 May 2022

COVID-19 vaccinations are safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women. This is the finding of Wits University Scientists who recently reviewed the effect of the vaccines during pregnancy. The narrative review by scientists identified no major safety concerns in the use of mostly mRNA (messenger RNA) Covid-19 vaccines among pregnant women. The lead author of the review, Professor Marta Nunes said pregnant women and their unborn babies are both protected when the mother gets the jab. "Pregnant women should receive the Covid-19 vaccination and the main reason being that Covid-19 disease during pregnancy can affect the outcome of the pregnancy, so they should protect themselves," said Nunes.

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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.

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PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

South African Health Review 2021

Health Systems Trust | 2021

When it comes to service delivery and access in both the public and private health sectors, COVID-19 has put everything to the test. It has demonstrated how central public health security is to health and livelihoods, and how pandemic health emergencies expose the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of health systems, costing lives and causing immeasurable damage to economies. Few could have imagined the impact of COVID-19 when this pandemic reached our shores in March 2020.

This edition considers the government's and broader health sector's response to COVID-19, explores the

current challenges facing the health system at this unprecedented time, and reflects on lessons learnt for future for public health emergencies. The chapters offer information on, inter alia, the challenges of balancing lives with livelihoods, and the impact of COVID-19 on different cadres of healthcare workers, especially Community Health Workers who found themselves at the forefront of our COVID-19 response. Other areas covered include the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations like children, persons with disabilities, farmworkers, migrants, and the poorest in our society.

For A Safer, Healthier And Fairer World: Results Report

World Health Organization

Measurable impact in countries lies at the heart of WHO's mission to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable. WHO's strategy, the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 (GPW 13) focuses on delivering measurable improvements to health in all countries. The Executive Board recommended the extension of the period of the GPW 13 from 2023 to 2025. GPW 13 set triple billion targets for healthier populations, universal health coverage and health emergencies (one billion more people enjoying better health and well-being, one billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage, and one billion people better protected from health emergencies by 2023), based on the Sustainable Development Goals. It also defines how WHO will help countries attain the targets through leadership, global public health goods and technical products, and country support. The GPW 13 triple billion targets continue to be a powerful force to drive and deliver change. They provide a unified approach to achieving the health-related Sustainable Development Goals and contribute to improvements in healthy life expectancy.

COVID-19 Clinical and Operational Guideline for Mothers, Newborns and Children

Department of Health

This guideline complements the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) guidelines published as "CLINICAL MANAGEMENT OF SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED COVID-19 DISEASE", which are updated regularly. It incorporates guidance on COVID-19 from the WHO, professional bodies and current literature on how patients are managed elsewhere.

NICD South Africa Field Epidemiology Training Programme Call for applicants for 2023 intake

The South African Field Epidemiology Training Programme (SAFETP) is now accepting applications for the 2023 intake, from qualified health professionals with interest in public health and commitment to public service. Field Epidemiology Training Programmes (FETPs) have been established in many countries around the world to provide training and develop competencies that are essential for effective disease detection, investigation, control, and prevention, with a goal of enhancing the health security of communities. FETP trainees spend minimum time in the classroom (less than 25% of the training time) and maximum time in the field, where they develop practical skills to collect, analyze, and use data to address priority public health issues and inform policy decisions.

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Hybrid event: Building momentum on reducing unhealthy diets and NCD prevention: Investments, solutions and best practice

Date: 24 May 2022

Time: 17:30 – 19:00 (CEST) followed by a reception at the venue.

Place: Geneva Press Club, Chemin de l'Impératrice 18, 1292 Pregny-Chambésy, Switzerland.

Unhealthy diets and the resulting malnutrition are one of the most serious current global challenges for public health, economic development and environmental sustainability. More and more countries are faced with the double burden of malnutrition where undernutrition coexists alongside overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This challenge is affecting countries at all levels of wealth and development, with marginalized groups from lower economic sectors being most affected.

Join us in this event organized by NCD Alliance, Vital Strategies, NCD Child and World Obesity

Federation on the sidelines of the 75th session of the World Health Assembly. We will discuss with a panel of experts the investment case of existing solutions to promote healthier diets and advance NCD prevention. For those who will not attend in-person, you may follow this event via Zoom. Please RSVP for onsite or online participation.

World No Tobacco Day 2022

World Health Organization

Date: 31 May 2022

The harmful impact of the tobacco industry on the environment is vast and growing adding unnecessary pressure to our planet's already scarce resources and fragile ecosystems. Tobacco kills over 8 million people every year and destroys our environment, further harming human health, through the cultivation, production, distribution, consumption, and post-consumer waste.

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Facility Team Leader: HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING (HSS) UNIT

Closing Date: 2022-05-24

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