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## ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

### **The influence of HIV infection and antiretroviral treatment on pulmonary function in individuals in an urban setting in sub-Saharan Africa**

*South African Journal of HIV Medicine* | 15 November 2021

Approximately 70% of all people with HIV infection live in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with South Africa constituting the largest HIV epidemic profile in the world.<sup>1</sup> Before the roll-out of antiretroviral therapy (ART) programmes, the most frequent complications of HIV infection included pulmonary infections, which were a major cause of morbidity and mortality rates. The widespread use of ART for the treatment of HIV has contributed to an increased life expectancy among people living with HIV (PLHIV), which is subsequently associated with increases in non-communicable diseases in PLHIV. Among non-communicable diseases, obstructive lung disorders (OLDs) constitute a major class. The burden of chronic respiratory diseases is generally increasing across the globe, and asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are among the main causes of mortality and morbidity. Whilst risk factors, such as smoking and opportunistic infections, contribute to this increased risk, the literature suggests that HIV infection and ART use may be associated with the development of OLDs. Viral suppression resulting from ART could contribute to the preservation of lung function. However, some studies suggest that there is a direct negative effect of ART on pulmonary function.

### **Prevalence of overweight and obesity among school children and parents: a cross-sectional study**

*Rural and Remote Health* | 18 November 2021

*Hatice Arslan, Cihad Dunder, Özlem Terzi*

Obesity, a complex and multifactorial disease causing severe health problems, is still the second most important cause of preventable deaths after smoking. Another risk is that childhood obesity is associated with overweight and obesity in adulthood. This study provides information on the prevalence of overweight and obesity in primary school students and their parents on location (rural v urban) and gender.

### **Linkage to TB care: A qualitative study to understand linkage from the patients' perspective in the Western Cape Province, South Africa**

*Plos One* | 19 November 2021

*Nosivuyile Vanqa, Graeme Hoddinott, Baxolele Mbenyana, Muhammad Osman, Sue-Ann Meehan*  
Delayed linkage to tuberculosis (TB) treatment leads to poor patient outcomes and increased onward transmission. Between 12% and 25% of people diagnosed with TB are never linked to a primary health care facility for continued care. The TB health program is for creating processes that promote and facilitates easy access to care. We explored how TB patients experience TB services and how this influenced their choices around linkage to TB care and treatment.

### **SARS-CoV-2 antigen-detecting rapid tests for the delta variant**

*The Lancet Microbe | 24 November 2021*

*Merien Bekliz, Kenneth Adea, Manel Essaidi-Lasiosi, Jillian Sacks, Camille Escadafal, et al.*

Given the emergence of novel SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, the performance of available diagnostics for these new variants should be investigated. SARS-CoV-2 antigen rapid diagnostic tests (Ag-RDTs) offer quick, cheap, and laboratory-independent results at the point of care. Although sensitivity is lower compared with RT-PCR, these tests enable reliable detection of high viral loads associated with the presence of infectious viral particles, making them important public health tools. However, the majority of Ag-RDT validation studies were done before the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern. We previously performed an analytical sensitivity testing of nine commercially available Ag-RDTs for the first three identified variants of concern (alpha, beta, and gamma) and one former variant of interest (zeta).

### **Removing unfair barriers to blood donation**

*The Lancet Haematology | December 2021 edition*

*Editorial*

On June 14, 2021, the criteria for blood donation in the UK were changed to permit men who had sex with men in the past 3 months to donate blood. Although this change marked a beneficial shift of focus from the identity of the donor to the risk of their individual experiences, the decision also drew attention to a longstanding clause that limits donation from Black communities. The clause, which requires donors to state whether they have recently had sex with someone who might have been sexually active in areas where HIV is endemic, has led to a large number of Black African and other potential donors being unable, or feeling discouraged, to donate blood.

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## **RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS**

### **Fewer hospital admissions projected for SA's fourth Covid-19 wave, but bed capacity may be an issue**

*Health24 | 18 November 2021*

Hospital admissions and deaths during South Africa's expected fourth wave of Covid-19 infections are "projected to be considerably smaller than those of previous waves" thanks to the country's vaccination coverage, according to the latest report from South African Covid-19 Modelling Consortium scientists. Using modelling, the team explained during a media briefing on Wednesday that they considered various fourth wave scenarios and took into account vaccinations and variants. The scenarios were also based on two factors: people's behaviour in the coming months, and the emergence of a hypothetical new variant of concern (VOC) evading vaccine-induced immunity.

### **The boosters are here. What does that mean?**

*Bhekisisa | 19 November 2021*

For now, booster COVID vaccines are mostly offered to those with weakened immune systems. Here's what we know about how long COVID shots can protect you.

### **In-depth: Is government ready to invest in mental health?**

*Spotlight | 19 November 2021*

Commemorating World Mental Health Day on 25 October, Acting Director-General in the National Department of Health Dr Nicholas Crisp during a webinar hosted by the department used the word "frightening" to describe the current investment into mental health services while very low numbers of people actually receive the care they need. Based on recently published data, the government spends about 5% of the country's total health budget on mental health, but these services only reach about one in

ten people who need mental health support. More importantly, it is, but also that there are huge inefficiencies in how and where we spend the little we have. This must change.

### **Life Healthcare: 13 patients got saline solution instead of COVID vaccine**

*EWN | 19 November 2021*

Life Healthcare has confirmed 13 patients were accidentally injected with saline solution during their COVID-19 vaccination visits at the life Springs Parkland Hospital on the Eastrand. The hospital said it immediately contacted the individuals affected as soon as it became aware of the error, and they had since received the correct jab.

### **Covid-19 will likely become endemic, but how long will it take?**

*Health24 | 19 November 2021*

Many scientists say that Covid-19 is here to stay - which means that the virus will not be eliminated, but will become endemic. When we reach that point, however, depends on numerous factors like immunity derived through natural infection and vaccination; waning antibody levels; virus transmissibility and the emergence of new variants; and vaccine efficacy and uptake. Taking the above into consideration, researchers of a new study show how these different factors affect the gradual progression of the pandemic into an endemic state, where virus levels are maintained, with largely predictable patterns.

### **Gender-based violence is a male problem, so men need to step up and fight South Africa's shameful scourge**

*Daily Maverick | 22 November 2021*

*Message from the President*

It's only ever women and children taking part in the 16 Days of Activism. Gender-based violence is a problem of male violence, so it is men who need to stand up for the rights of women and children. If a nation's character can be judged by how it treats women and children, then we are falling desperately short. A week before the launch of the annual 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children, the latest crime statistics released by the South African Police Service (SAPS) show an increase in rapes, domestic violence and, perhaps most worryingly, in child murders.

### **The science of sequencing: How Africa is preparing for future pandemics**

*Bhekisisa | 22 November 2021*

In October 2020, South African scientist Tulio de Oliveira and his team, sequencing coronavirus samples at their lab in the eastern coastal city of Durban, were the first to detect the Beta variant — also called B.1.351 — of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. “We immediately informed our ministry of health and our President Cyril Ramaphosa when we discovered the Beta variant in South Africa very early in our second wave (of SARS-COV-2 infections),” said de Oliveira, a bioinformatician who has become a familiar face on South African television during the pandemic. Within a day, new legislation was drafted, putting the country into a stricter level of lockdown. “It took less than 48 hours of knowing about the new variant to do that,” he said.

### **Covid-19 is surging in Europe: Why is this happening, and should we be worried in SA?**

*Health24 | 22 November 2021*

Europe is back “at the epicentre” of the pandemic, the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned early in November. Countries across the continent have been experiencing a surge in cases. According to WHO officials, Europe has seen a more than 50% increase in Covid cases. WHO Europe head Hans Kluge said in a statement that the continent could experience half a million more Covid deaths by February 2022.

### **During these 16 Days of Activism, Don't Leave the LGBTIQ Community Behind**

*Women's eNews | 22 November 2021*

Every year, November 25 is marked as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. And every year, December 10 is marked as Human Rights Day. The days in between – 16 of them to be exact – are the annual 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. They serve as a reminder that such violence continues to be a crucial battle in the fight for gender equality, and that women's rights are human rights. Although the 16 days of activism are typically viewed as a fight for women and girls, they are also crucial for, and need to be inclusive of, LGBTIQ people. Especially now.

Why? Because the causes of gender-based violence against women and girls in all of their diversity, and gender-based violence against LGBTIQ people, are the same.

### **Covid-19: Vaccine uptake slows amid surge in new cases**

*Health24 | 22 November 2021*

The uptake of first-dose vaccinations has remained 20% lower than during the municipal elections at the beginning of November, the health department says. On Monday, the health department administered 110 604 vaccine doses, of which 55 353 were first doses. This has inched the country closer to reaching the 25 million vaccination mark.

### **South Africa fourth wave predicted as Covid-19 cases rise**

*BusinessTech | 23 November 2021*

The rise in cases comes days after the National Institute for Communicable Diseases said that the incidence of Covid-19 was increasing in wastewater samples of some areas of Gauteng, the most populous province. South African Medical Research Council data show that excess deaths, the number of deaths over an historical average, have been rising in recent weeks. There has been a rise in the number of people testing positive in Gauteng, particularly in the Tshwane municipal area that includes the capital Pretoria, the NICD said in a later statement on Monday.

### **Thousands of KZN healthcare workers not vaccinated for COVID-19**

*IOL | 23 November 2021*

“THE KwaZulu-Natal Health Department's vaccination statistics for two days last week paint a gloomy picture of how health workers are dragging their feet when it comes to getting Covid-19 vaccinations. Statistics made available by the provincial Health Department show that 20 302 health-care workers (HCWs) have not been vaccinated.”

### **Experts explain why so many young adults in SA don't want Covid-19 vaccine**

*News24 | 23 November 2021*

“What we pick up is that many young people believe the disinformation spread on social media,” said Crisp. “They have greater access to social media and are easily influenced. Whatever is holding young people back is not in their interests at all,” he added. The reasons for this are likely multifactorial, he said, and cited the younger age group as the one being most tuned into social media. “It may well be that they're buying into the misinformation that's being spread on social media.”

### **South Africa delays Covid-19 vaccine deliveries because it has too much stock**

*News24 | 24 November 2021*

South Africa has asked Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer to delay delivery of Covid-19 vaccines because it now has too much stock, health ministry officials say, as vaccine hesitancy slows an inoculation campaign. About 35% of South Africans are fully vaccinated, higher than in most other African nations, but half the government's year-end target. It has averaged 106 000 doses a day in the past 15 days in a nation of 60 million people.

### **Heart Rate Irregularities Associated With Long COVID-19 in Women**

*Pharmacy Times | 24 November 2021*

Women with long COVID-19 experience heart rate irregularities in response to physical exertion, which could potentially limit exercise tolerance and free-living physical activity, according to research published in *Experimental Physiology*. The investigators posit that due to the greater prevalence of age-related physical disability among women, targeted rehabilitation programs may be necessary for persistent heart and lung problems in women with lingering symptoms of COVID-19.

### **Circumcision reducing HIV infections but COVID-19 caused setbacks**

*Spotlight | 25 November 2021*

According to a **UNAIDS report** released earlier this year, there have been 13 years of good progress since voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) was first recommended by UNAIDS and the World Health Organization in 2007. The report covers only the period until the end of 2019 and thus does not reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **New COVID-19 variant detected in South Africa**

*Health E-News | 25 November 2021*

A new COVID-19 variant has been detected in South Africa, scientists confirmed during an urgent briefing on Thursday afternoon. The variant, currently known as B.1.1.529 exhibits a large number of mutations, according to researchers. This has raised concerns about its transmissibility, severity, and potential vaccine resistance. Professor Tulio de Oliveira said the variant had also been detected in Botswana and Hong Kong.

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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**

### **Measuring the shadow pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19 [EN/AR/RU]**

*Reliefweb | 24 November 2021*

New UN Women data confirms violence against women has worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report launch kicks off the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, from 25 November to 10 December, under the theme, "Orange the World: End Violence against Women Now!" The report shows that women's feelings of safety have been eroded, leading to significant negative impacts on their mental and emotional well-being.

### **UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025**

The Strategic Plan 2022–2025 will guide UN Women for the next four years—with an eye toward the 2030 deadline to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It articulates how UN Women will leverage its unique triple mandate—encompassing normative support, UN system coordination, and operational activities—to mobilize urgent and sustained action to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Strategic Plan is based on key findings from an extensive consultative process and draws from the analysis of lessons learned and recommendations from evaluations, audits, and other assessments, including those from the 25-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

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## CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### 2021 World AIDS Day webinar

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Theme: Ending the HIV Epidemic: Equitable Access, Everyone's Voice

Date: Wednesday, 1 December 2021

Time: 14:00 – 15:30

### Community Partnerships to Promote the Equitable Distribution of the Covid-19 Vaccine Part I: Outreach and Educational Efforts

*Rural Health Information Hub*

In this 90 min webinar, Health Outreach Partners will deliver a Part One of a two-part webinar series highlighting community partnerships created during the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out. This webinar will feature guest speakers who will discuss the partnerships that helped enable or improve their COVID-19 vaccine outreach and educational efforts, placing a special emphasis on interventions targeting special and vulnerable populations.

Date: 7 December 2021

Time: 21:00

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## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

### HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING (HSS): Health Information (HIT) Technicians (3)

*Closing Date: 6 December 2021*

### HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING (HSS): Area Co-ordinators (2)

*Closing Date: 6 December 2021*

### HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING (HSS): Operations Manager – SA Sure project

*Closing Date: 7 December 2021*

### HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING (HSS): Clinical Laboratory Advisors (5)

*Closing Date: 7 December 2021*

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