



Connecting Organisations for
Regional Disease Surveillance

February 2021

Welcome....

to our February 2021 latest news update. CORDS is a program of Ending Pandemics, comprised of six regional networks, working to reduce and prevent the spread of diseases by exchanging information and best practice. Our vision is a world united against infectious diseases. Early detection of outbreaks helps keep disease transmission to its area of origin, which, in our increasingly mobile world, is vital to stopping life threatening diseases such as Zika, Ebola and Yellow Fever. The collective expertise of the CORDS networks and their close relationships with local communities facilitate timely detection and response to outbreaks.

Regional responses to the Covid-19 pandemic

All of the countries in the Asia Partnership on Emerging Infectious Diseases Research ([APEIR](#)) region are focused on Covid-19 vaccinations distribution. China has developed several vaccines and by January 2021 had given almost 30 million people their first dose, with seven million fully vaccinated. Indonesia, who currently has around a million cases of the disease has given just over nine million doses to their front-line workers. In Thailand vaccinations have begun and are due to be completed by mid-2021. Vietnam has approved one vaccine and continues negotiations with other manufacturers. Vietnam is also working on developing its own vaccine with expectations that a national vaccine could be distributed to its population in October 2021. Cambodia is expecting to import vaccines from China and Russia, with the first shipment due to arrive this month. Earlier this month Lao PDR received 300,000 doses of vaccine which are being given to medical workers and at-risk front-line workers.

The countries in the East African Integrated Disease Surveillance Network ([EAIDSNet](#)) are experiencing a second wave. Vaccines have not yet reached the region and are not expected to do so until later this year. The network has been considering the possible reasons why mortality incidence may be lower in Africa compared to regions such as Europe. These include a younger population, cross-immunity with other corona viruses, a low level of travel, an outdoor lifestyle, the experience of other diseases increasing compliance and an overall low level of testing. The South African variant has not been found in Uganda yet where there are a high number of daily cases but has been discovered in Kenya and is likely to be in Zimbabwe. Rwanda is currently in a severe lockdown where residents require permits to leave home. In Burundi and South Sudan cases continue at a slow pace, likely due to low capacity for testing and reporting. Despite significant improvement on the problem of trucks crossing at border points in the region there still remains a high level of movement between countries.

The Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance ([MECIDS](#)) has continued their Covid-19 webinar series, following a grant from the European Union. This second [series](#) features nine sessions and began on 17 November 2020 when they hosted 'Covid-19 in the Middle East: Burden of Disease and Epidemiological Aspects', for public health professionals, followed on 20 December 2020 by 'Dilemmas and challenges in COVID-19 vaccines' – WHO working group, for health care givers. The network started this year with 'Covid-19 and vaccinations' for public health staff as well as the general public on 1 January

2021. On 21 January MECIDS hosted a webinar exploring the latest on the pandemic and vaccinations for the general public. This month the network has hosted two further webinars: 'An update on laboratory methods for the detection of SARS-Cov-2' on 4 February and a webinar looking at the current disease and vaccine situation in Jordan on 18 February. There was also a five-day training session on Common Ground Approaches (CGA) on 17 February, for MECIDS participants from the three countries on risk communication, lessons learned from the Ebola experience and other related topics.

The South African Foundation for One Health (**SACIDS**) has published the lessons they have learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic from an African perspective (see story below). Unlike with Ebola, and thanks to early support and intervention, they have been able to identify the index case in several countries. All of the countries in the region are now experiencing a second wave. The South African variant is in Zambia and there is significant evidence it is likely to be in Tanzania too. Across the region colleagues have been practicing One Health to utilise resources for example the veterinary virological expertise at Sokoine University and laboratory training in Zambia. Genomic sequencing is currently taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. The network is hopeful that affordable sequencing will be one of the positive outcomes of the pandemic.

Restrictions continue in the majority of the The Southeast European Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases (**SECID**) region. The main priority is accessing the vaccine and logistics around training and infrastructure. Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Serbia have begun vaccinating with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Moldova and Montenegro hoping to receive supplies this month. The South-Eastern Europe Health Network, which SECID is a member of, held its 43rd plenary meeting on 25 November 2020 with the theme 'Covid-19 projections across the South East European region for the winter season: current status and perspectives.' SECID was represented by its Chair, Dr Silvia Bino. The meeting provided an opportunity to anticipate the likely scenarios ahead and to discuss the region's health system preparedness.

SECID is partnering with and being supported by Ending Pandemics to develop a joint One Health platform to enable early detection and coordinated responses to disease outbreaks. The platform builds on the Information System for Infectious Diseases (SISI) in operation by the Albanian Public Health Institute since January 2020. It is envisioned that technology solutions will expand inter-sectoral work with consensus protocols that will be shared with all SECID member countries.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



Covid-19 training for community health workers in Africa

The African Union Covid-19 training for community workers was developed jointly by the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), SACIDS Foundation for One Health ([SACIDS](https://www.sacids.org)), the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team (UK-PHRST) and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC).

The Partnership to Accelerate Covid-19 Testing Initiative (PACT) was established by Africa CDC to take forward the African Union Joint Continental Strategy for Covid-19 which aims to prevent the spread of the disease and deaths and to reduce the social and economic harm associated with the pandemic. The training module was designed to give community health workers a brief orientation. The two-day course, primarily designed and developed by SACIDS, is comprised of ten sessions which cover transmission and prevention including the risks factors for the disease globally such as age, obesity and gender, as well as those still being explored which may have more of an effect in Africa, such as HIV and TB, malaria and other endemic diseases, poor access to water and sanitation, overcrowding, malnourishment and low socio-economic status.

The role of community health workers is covered along with the importance of community-based surveillance and engagement and the impact of the speed of response. Participants learn how to observe and gather information and intelligence from community groups and leaders, social networks, and the media. Personal security and protection, contact tracing and how to support people in quarantine and isolation are also covered.

To access the training visit:

<http://www.sacids.org/news/covid-19-community-health-workers/>

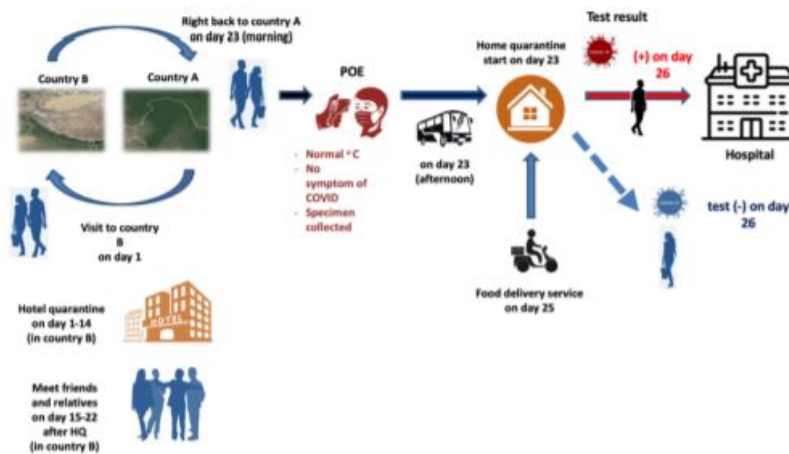


Figure 1 MBDS TTX Scenario

MBDS Regional Covid-19 Simulation Exercise

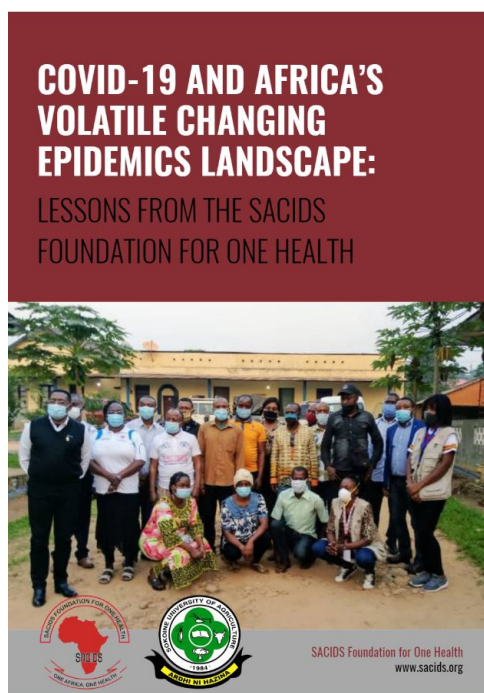
CORDS member network, The Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance Foundation ([MBDS](#)), held a regional virtual tabletop and simulation exercise on 14 and 15 January 2021, supported by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). The objectives of the meeting were to: help contain the spread and transmission of Covid-19, to identify each country's ability to share information on outbreak transmission, individual and collective responses, case management and stakeholder collaboration and to deploy human and material resources to control the simulated outbreak.

On 14 January, national and regional health officials in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam took part in the same tabletop and simulation exercise simultaneously. The next day health officials from the four countries met virtually to discuss the outcomes of the scenario with a focus on airport and ground crossing points of entry as part of their Covid-19 management plans. The team from China also presented. The meeting was chaired by MBDS Chair Dr. Htun Tin, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Health and Sports, Myanmar.

Colleagues from Cambodia emphasized that a multi-sectoral approach is key for success, with recommendations including continued cooperation at cross-border checkpoints and improving and restricting non-formal checkpoints. Representatives from Myanmar highlighted the usefulness of the exercise for health staff responding to the pandemic. The team recommended a bi-lateral agreement on travel measures amongst regional countries and collaboration on bilingual public health promotion materials. The Thai team explained the measures they used to flatten the curve including the use of a daily press conference to provide essential information to the public. Members from Vietnam stressed the importance of communication with and gaining the support of communities. Colleagues from China shared how polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing has played a vital role in their national response and how risk-based community lockdown mitigates the impact on society.

Overall, the need for countries in the region to continue to collaborate was agreed upon as well as the value of addressing the Covid-19 pandemic through a regional perspective, allowing countries to benefit from the experience of their neighbours. The desire to build capacity and logistical support in the region was a key takeaway as well as the suggestion that the next exercise should involve a vaccine related scenario. Short films of the simulation exercise in each country can be viewed on the MBDS YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYggz1dBhMQwsqvDYigUs7Q>



Covid-19 and Africa's volatile changing epidemics landscape: lessons from SACIDS Foundation for One Health

CORDS member network SACIDS Foundation for One Health ([SACIDS](#)) has published a report summarising their response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the lessons learnt from an African perspective. When alerted to the pandemic in early 2020, SACIDS sought financial support to enable member institutions to provide expertise for national preparedness and a prompt response. SACIDS, in collaboration with Africa CDC and fellow CORDS African network the East African Integrated Disease Surveillance Network ([EAIDSNet](#)), received funding from the [Skoll Foundation](#). As a result, SACIDS institutions were able to diagnose and to sub-type the disease whilst enhancing surveillance and risk communication in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

Part of the regional response has been to assess the context specific Covid-19 risk and mitigation strategies for Africa. A risk analysis of the health system resilience in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia was conducted, as well as an exploration of the ways in which social systems have responded to the challenges and opportunities. The relatively young age of the African population was found to be a possible mitigation factor in mortality, as well as extended family living arrangements providing protection for the more vulnerable elderly population as part of a combination of socio-anthropological factors, especially in rural areas.

The report concluded that the triple epidemic of Covid-19, Ebola and Anti-microbial resistance (AMR) in Africa requires expertise in disease surveillance and pathogen detection and identification. SACIDS aims to create a pool of experts who can be deployed in regional and national emergencies. The knowledge and experiences gained will then be shared with the other CORDS networks as part of a joint ambition to achieve early detection and response through ongoing surveillance.

SACIDS noted that unlike in previous major epidemics the network was able to provide its academic and research expertise in the DRC, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia concurrently and to support national authorities to respond from the index case stage. This coordination advantage was applicable to the six countries in the EAIDSNet region: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, with continental coordination provided by Africa CDC.

To read the full report, visit:

<https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/changing-epidemics-landscape/96422/>



Systematizing the One Health Approach in Preparedness and Response Efforts for Infectious Disease Outbreaks: A Workshop

23-25 February 2021

This virtual meeting will examine ways to systemize and integrate the One Health approach as part of outbreak prevention, detection, preparedness, and response efforts. The workshop will explore research opportunities, multi-sectoral collaboration mechanisms, community engagement strategies, educational opportunities, and policies that can effectively implement the core capacities and interventions of One Health principles to strengthen national health systems and enhance global health security. Session one will take place on 23 February 2021 from 10am-1pm EST with a focus on what One Health has accomplished so far. Session two is on 24 February 2021 from 10am-1pm EST where the surveillance and detection facet of outbreak preparedness will be highlighted. The final session takes place on 25 February 2021 also from 10am-1pm EST where the capacities that need to be built to ensure global health security will be considered as well as priority actions for incorporating One Health into national healthcare systems.

For more information visit:

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/event/02-25-2020/systematizing-the-one-health-approach-in-preparedness-and-response-efforts-for-infectious-disease-outbreaks-a-workshop>

To register visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/one-health-approach-for-infectious-disease-outbreaks-tickets-131067401125>



Register now

University of Tel Aviv virtual course on 'Vaccines against bacterial and viral infections including Covid-19'

3 March to 16 June 2021

This virtual course led by MECIDS Chair, Professor Daniel Cohen, will cover key concepts in vaccinology, integrating references to the vaccine development and current immunization strategies against Covid-19 for each topic. The course will review the evolution of vaccine development approaches and present the characteristics of currently licensed vaccines and those authorized for emergency use. The process from conception to research and development, to first-in-man studies and further evaluation of safety, immunogenicity and efficacy of candidate vaccines through clinical development phases will be presented and analyzed. Methods to quantifying the induced immune response and the protective efficacy conferred by vaccine candidates will be reviewed, and the notion of correlates of protection will be elaborated upon. Post-licensure approaches in evaluation of vaccines for effectiveness, impact and signal of detection of adverse events will be presented and discussed. Highlights and challenges of the present immunization programs worldwide will be described vis-à-vis the burden of corresponding vaccine preventable diseases. Special attention will be given to the analysis of psychosocial factors associated with hesitancy to vaccination in various populations. Lecturers will present accomplishments and challenges with selected licensed and investigational vaccines. Throughout the course will emphasize the importance of the use of advanced epidemiological tools to prioritize the development of new vaccines and assess to existing immunization programs.

The application deadline is **1 March 2021**. For enquiries contact: perlmans@tauex.tau.ac.il

For more information visit:

<https://en-med.tau.ac.il/School-of-Public-Health/VaccinesCourse2021>

To apply visit:

<https://portal.telavivuniv.org/createprofile.php>

Protecting workers from Covid-19 training

The Center for One Health Research at the University of Washington has produced a series of free online training courses on protecting workers from Covid-19 and other infections. The modules have been designed to help with the process of creating and implementing infection prevention and control plans on animal farms.

For more information visit:

<https://deohs.washington.edu/cohr/farm-infection-training>



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