

April 2021

Welcome....

to our April 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.



Image: SACIDS with the Ministry of Health team at the Kabanga border post for the Point of Entry Digital Surveillance Platform Training

CORDS member networks respond to Covid-19

SACIDS Foundation for One Health ([SACIDS](#)) in collaboration with the Tanzania Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children developed a digital traveler's surveillance system

in November 2020 designed to enhance entry and exit screening. The existing system has challenges including delayed detection of unusual events, problems with data analysis and labor intensity and is slow and hard to manage. The new surveillance system was validated by stakeholders in December 2020 and piloted. Before officially rolling out the digital system, the Ministry of Health with support from SACIDS Foundation for One Health conducted simultaneous training sessions (8 March to 21 March 2021) for six selected pilot areas with teams divided into two zones, the North and South of Tanzania. The plan is to roll out and operationalize the system at 54 points of entries in the Tanzania Mainland to enhance the detection of public health events.

The Expert Team of Indonesia National Task Force for Covid-19 Mitigation is led by Prof. Wiku Adisasmito, the Coordinator of the Asia Partnership on Emerging Infectious Disease Research ([APEIR](#)). The expert team has successfully developed an integrated data system for recording and reporting, known as Bersatu Lawan Covid-19 (BLC). The team also developed basic information to determine Covid-19 risk area zoning, which is used by both local and national government to develop policy as part of the pandemic response. Prof. Wiku is also the Chairman of the Indonesian research consortium who are supporting Covid-19 vaccination research.

The countries of the East African Integrated Disease Surveillance Network ([EAIDSNet](#)) region are seeing a low number of positive Covid-19 cases which may be due to a decline in the pandemic or a lack of testing. Kenya received its first batch of Covid-19 vaccines in March and is prioritising healthcare workers and security personnel. Rwanda has been vaccinating its population since March with high-risk populations given priority. South Sudan has also begun its vaccination program starting with healthcare workers with the aim of vaccinating 40% of its population overall. Uganda is currently vaccinating healthcare workers, security personnel, teachers, humanitarian frontline workers, those over 50 with underlying health conditions and those with similar conditions in the 18-50 age group. EAIDSNet Chair Julius Lutwama is working with colleagues in Uganda on a package of public health messages to try and encourage vaccine uptake.

The countries in the Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance Foundation ([MBDS](#)) Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, continue to work very hard to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. The table below shows the latest statistics in the region:

Covid-19 situation in the Mekong Region (As of 20 April 2021)

| Country | Total Cases | Active Cases | Critical | Recovered | Deaths |
|----------|-------------|--------------|----------|-----------|--------|
| Cambodia | 7,444 | 4,840 | - | 2,555 | 49 |
| China | 90,520 | 311 | 5 | 85,573 | 4,636 |
| Lao PDR | 58 | 9 | - | 49 | - |
| Myanmar | 142,644 | 7,535 | - | 131,903 | 3,206 |
| Thailand | 45,185 | 16,119 | 1 | 28,958 | 108 |
| Vietnam | 2,791 | 281 | - | 2,475 | 35 |

Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

The countries in the Mekong Basin have been preparing their vaccination roll out plan since the end of 2020. The AstraZeneca vaccine is being offered by Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. The Sinopharm vaccine is being offered in Cambodia, China, Lao PDR and Thailand. China is also using the Sinovac and Convidecia vaccines. During 2021, the countries have a target to vaccinate their entire populations. Detailed information on their roll out plans can be accessed here: [MBDS Newsletter No. 69](#).

The Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance ([MECID](#)) have continued their successful Covid-19 webinar [series](#). On 11 March they held a virtual expert meeting where Prof. Daniel Cohen, MECIDS Chair presented on the epidemiological situation and vaccination campaign in Israel and Dr

Michael Mandelbaum, Central Virology Laboratory, Israel, spoke on the current virology laboratory surveillance for Covid-19 in the country. Dr Sami Sheikh Ali, Ministry of Health, Jordan, presented on the epidemiological situation in Jordan and Dr Ghaya Al-Wahdani on the national laboratory capacity during the pandemic at a webinar on 18 March. Prof. Cohen is currently teaching a course at Tel Aviv University on vaccinations against bacterial and viral infections for graduate students, March-June 2021. The course conducted in English covers several infectious diseases, with topics on Covid-19 and SARS Cov2 vaccines.

Most of the countries in the Southeast Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases ([SECID](#)) region are still in a partial lockdown. The well-established links between the countries means that communication has flowed well during the Covid-19 pandemic and neighbours have benefitted from sharing knowledge and best practices. All of the SECID countries are now vaccinating. Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania have benefitted from European Union vaccine negotiations. Covid-19 infections are down in countries including Albania, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia. Albania is part of the COVAX program and plans to vaccinate its 2.2 million population over the course of the next 12 to 14 months, with tourists hopefully able to visit this summer. Bosnia and Herzegovina has received several shipments of Covid-19 vaccines and are expecting more. Kosovo* has seen an increase in infection rates recently and has received vaccines from Albania as well as from COVAX. Serbia's vaccination program has been a success with excess supply donated to neighbours including Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Montenegro. In North Macedonia they are currently vaccinating priority group one, those aged over 77. Members of the SECID team in Albania are also involved in a healthcare worker vaccination evaluation study along with representatives from Georgia, Israel and USA.

* 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.

- Vaccination started on 11 January 2021 focusing on first line health care workers, with Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.



Image: part of the Covid-19 vaccination program in Albania

Covid-19 vaccination in South East European countries: challenges and opportunities

During the Covid-19 pandemic the countries of the South East European region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Kosovo* have established and improved their influenza vaccination programs and strengthened National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAG) or vaccine expert group capacities. The region has also improved

vaccine management and delivery logistics through a partnership between CORDS member network the Southeast European Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases (**SECID**) and the South Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN) in collaboration with the Task Force for Global Health, CDC Atlanta, WHO Europe and the European Centre for Disease Prevention.

To discuss the challenges of Covid-19 vaccination, a zoom meeting of SEEHN members, including SECID was held on 9 February 2021. Attendees included NITAG representatives, managers of national immunization programs from each country, technical partners, and critical stakeholders. Following presentations from each country and stakeholder, lack of vaccination access for countries in the region who are under pressure from the public and the media to start vaccinating like their European Union member neighbours, emerged as a common issue. Further challenges to achieving safe and effective vaccination include various cold chain requirements, expanding human resources, supply and logistical capacities, safety monitoring and risk communication. Continued technical support is required as well as support to increase vaccination access. National vaccination plans are developed in all countries and measures to ensure smooth implementation are being taken in accordance with WHO recommendations. CDC, WHO Euro and ECDC reiterated their commitment to help the Balkan countries face the pandemic trials ahead.

To find out more about the work of SECID visit:

www.secids.com

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MECIDS Common Ground Approach

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly brought much suffering and challenge, positives have also emerged such as the collaboration between neighbouring countries across the globe. One such region where the outbreak has led to an increase in cooperation amongst health professionals, is within CORDS member network, the Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance, **MECIDS**. Despite the ongoing extremely sensitive political situation, colleagues from Israel, Jordan and Palestine have stepped up their scientific information exchange, improving their response to the pandemic by sharing lessons learnt.

On this theme a Common Ground Approach Training course was held in Jordan and Palestine from 17 to 25 February 2021 with thirteen participants including epidemiologists and health professionals. The same course is currently being delivered in Israel. The objective is to provide partners and stakeholders with the skills and tools to enable them to find a shared approach to working together. The course is delivered in three parts: part one examines identities, conflict and violence, including responding to conflict and active listening. Part two considers conflict sensitivity in humanitarian responses including its application in emergencies. The final part explores Covid-19 risk communication and community engagement, highlighting MECIDS best practices from the pandemic and lessons learnt.

For more information on MECIDS visit:

<http://www.mecidsnetwork.org/>



Are YOU Ready to Help Prevent the Next Pandemic?

On 15 April 2021 [Ending Pandemics](#), who host CORDS, held an interactive Covid-19 webinar as part of the 18th Annual [Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship](#). The session 'Are YOU Ready to Help Prevent the Next Pandemic' gave participants a chance to meet the creators and implementors of participatory surveillance systems that engage directly with communities to help identify potential disease outbreaks faster. Hosted by Ending Pandemics President, Mark Smolinski, it featured [InSTEDD iLab Southeast Asia](#) who co-created a national disease hotline in Cambodia with the Ministry of Health and Participatory One Health Disease Detection [PODD](#), who detect emerging human, animal and environmental health threats in Thailand. Brief presentations were also given by representatives from [Praekelt](#) in South Africa who worked with the Department of Health on a Covid-19 information system and the Guardians of Health Project from Brazil where a team of the Ministry of Health worked with a local developer, [EpiTrack](#) to develop an application to detect potential outbreaks at mass gatherings (World Cup and Olympics).

CORDS member networks [SACIDS](#) One Health Foundation also presented on their digital surveillance system [Afyadata](#) an open-source tool for collecting and submitting data on human and animal disease in communities. SACIDS Chair, Prof. Mark Rweyemamu and Prof. Eson Karimuribo also shared their experiences of working with the Maasai community in Tanzania to help identify public health issues at an early stage.

To watch the session visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPcaluWZkt0&t=2171s>

IWOPS 2022 – 4th International Workshop on Participatory Surveillance, March 2022, Cambodia

IWOPS 2022, the 4th International Workshop on Participatory Surveillance is taking place in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in March 2022. Experts from around the world will be sharing experiences and best practices to help identify disease outbreaks faster by directly engaging communities. The meeting objectives are to:

- establish participatory surveillance as a standard of practice for early detection and rapid response

- advance the exchange of crowdsourced, syndromic data amongst new geographies and partners
- share experiences of participatory surveillance during the pandemic, in mass gatherings or among migrant, displaced or underserved populations
- link wearables, at-home diagnostics, digital thermometers, and genomic sequencing for validation
- explore crowdsourced data for disease forecasting and early warning.

For further information and updates visit:

<https://endingpandemics.org/iwops>



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