The Ministry of Health with support from WHO and partners scale-up response to COVID-19 in South Sudan

As coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spreads rapidly across Africa, the Ministry of Health, World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other partners have taken the necessary steps to mitigate the risk and interrupt the transmission of COVID-19. South Sudan confirmed its first COVID-19 case on 5 April 2020. As of 10 April 2020, four cases of COVID-19 have been reported. The country continues to face a huge burden of communicable disease outbreaks.

In response to this, WHO and other partners have been supporting the Ministry of Health to enhance emergency preparedness and response interventions in line with the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) and WHO Incident Management System.

As part of the support, WHO constructed the Public Health Emergency Operation Center, the first of its kind in South Sudan and the Dr John Garang multi-purpose Infectious Disease Unit; as well as strengthened the capacity of the laboratory to test infectious diseases such as measles, Ebola and COVID-19 among others.

In addition, the Ministry of Health in collaboration with WHO and other partners launched a nationwide preparedness and response plan for COVID-19 aimed to support coordination and planning with other actors, surveillance, rapid response teams and case investigation, case management, laboratory testing, risk communication, community engagement and social mobilization, and infection prevention and control.

In response to the conformation of COVID-19 cases, the country is conducting full outbreak investigation including tracing of contacts, intensifying surveillance, expanding case management capacity as well as mapping and training additional health personnel.

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**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Health experts raise awareness on COVID-19
- Journalists Trained on COVID-19
- Working together to prevent COVID-19
- Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable women and girls
- UNMAS celebrates International Mine Action Day by raising awareness on COVID-19
- IOM published first report on COVID-19
Nurses and midwives as front-line health workers are playing a crucial role in supporting the COVID-19 preparedness and response activities to ensure the rapid identification of cases to stop transmission and prevent the spread of the virus in order to save lives.

At the community level, WHO and partners have also intensified awareness campaigns on good hygiene practices and social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus. People exhibiting symptoms have been requested to isolate themselves at home and call the established helpline for immediate response.

“As we crossed 12 000 reported cases of COVID-19 in Africa and four confirmed cases in South Sudan, we need to take a comprehensive blended strategy for controlling the epidemics”, said Dr Olushayo Olu, the WHO Representative for South Sudan. “The spread of this virus can be significantly slowed or even reversed through the implementation of robust containment and control activities”.

The Government of South Sudan is committed to support partners in the fight against COVID-19. A High-Level National Task Force led by the First Vice President has been formed to oversee the preparedness and response to COVID-19.

As of 10 April 2020, over 12 000 cases with more than 600 deaths have been reported in Africa with South Africa registered the highest numbers of cases at 1 934 and Algeria registered the highest number of deaths at 235.

UNESCO is committed to playing a vital role in promotion of access to information, freedom of expression and ensuring safety of journalists in South Sudan, despite the Coronavirus crisis.

**HEALTH EXPERTS RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT COVID-19 AT UN PROTECTION SITE IN MALAKAL**

Health professionals are raising awareness among displaced families about how to prevent and respond to COVID-19 in the United Nations Protection of Civilians site in Malakal.

“Don’t spread myths and don’t follow harmful traditions. Please share the reliable, scientific facts that we are giving you with the thousands of people residing here in the protection site,” Dr. Emmanuel Timothy Thowl from the World Health Organization told 40 community leaders attending the educational session.

The group were asked to help enforce social distancing, frequent hand washing, and other hygienic practices necessary to prevent transmission. “As leaders of your community, your role is to keep your people informed about these measures of prevention. From now on, it is our collective responsibility,” said Hazel Dewet, head of the UNMISS field office in Malakal.

**JOURNALISTS TRAINED ON COVID-19**

UNESCO in partnership with WHO trained a group of twenty journalists drawn from print and broadcast media on COVID-19. The one-day training held in Juba, aimed at equipping journalists with accurate Information about COVID-19, with the aim to curb down on misinformation and rumors around the pandemic.

In his remarks, Mr. Julius Banda, UNESCO Country Representative reminded journalists that they have a duty to relay accurate information, refrain from sharing rumors and fake news and also encouraged the group to embrace messages in the local languages to ensure that all citizens are informed about the pandemic and that no one is left behind.

“Journalists have a duty to relay accurate information, refrain from sharing rumors and fake news”

Mr. Julius Banda
UNESCO
Country Representative
**UNITED NATIONS COUNTRY TEAM – SOUTH SUDAN**

**WORKING TOGETHER TO PREVENT COVID-19 INFECTIONS**

Community mobilisers raising awareness on COVID-19.  
**Photo Credit UNICEF**

UNICEF South Sudan is working closely with the Government, UN partners and non-governmental organizations to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNICEF is co-leading with the Government within the context of the national preparedness and response plan, activities related to risk communication and Community engagement, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) and WASH, to prevent infections and the spread of it.

Activities include the broadcasting across the country of public service announcements and jingles in multiple languages, the production and wide dissemination of information, education and communication materials and the organization of sensitization activities by social mobilisers and community workers.

On IPC and WASH activities include working in health facilities, ensuring frontline health workers know how to protect themselves from the virus and prevent transmission. The World Bank has partnered with UNICEF South Sudan for the COVID-19 response. UNICEF South Sudan has also received financial support from DFID.

**UNMAS CELEBRATED INTERNATIONAL MINE ACTION DAY BY RAISING MINE RISK AWARENESS WHILE SHARING COVID-19 PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

UNMAS staff orients community members on social distancing and alternative ways of greetings. **Photo Credit: UNMAS**

This year, UNMAS and partners commemorated this day in special means. No grand events, no gathering of hundreds of people, no onsite applause and laughter...instead, UNMAS reminded the population to be vigilant of mine risks at all time while adhering to the hygiene standard and social distancing rule as effective preventive measures to COVID-19.

In the rural areas of Torit, while sharing mine risk information of the surroundings, UNMAS demonstrated the importance of social distancing within the community and alternative ways of greetings to replace handshakes.

“Mine risk is particularly prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic for the communities living in rural areas. People go to fetch water to wash their hands, they need to be careful and always remember not to touch or remove any suspicious objects.” UNMAS delivered the message to the population on Radio Miraya.

**ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF MOST VULNERABLE WOMEN AND GIRLS**

UNFPA has put together a robust plan to ensure that no woman dies giving birth and that each woman and girl is protected from violence at home and in her community as South Sudan deals with the new coronavirus pandemic.

The UNFPA response is focused on ensuring continued access to safe deliveries, antenatal and neonatal health care; and continuing the life-saving care and support at all one-stop centers for survivors of gender-based violence, among others.

UNFPA also plans to recruit more midwives to support the health system response to COVID-19.

UNHCR SUPPORTS THE CONSTRUCTION OF FIVE COVID-19 TREATMENT CENTERS IN AJOUNG THOK AND PAMIR REFUGEE CAMPS

The UN Refugee Agency, with help from a team of refugee builders, is completing construction on five treatment units to support the COVID-19 response in Ajoung Thok and Pamir refugee camps, Unity State – the second largest refugee hosting area in South Sudan.

The units will enable doctors at established primary health care centers to scale up the capacity of the facilities to manage COVID-19 cases. John Musa, a 28-year-old Sudanese refugee working on the units, is proud to be a part of the project because, he said, “I am helping to protect my community.”

He plans to use the money from the job to stock up on essentials, so his wife and two children don’t have to venture to the market too often. “I want them to be safe,” he said.

FOOD ASSISTANCE HELPS STRUGGLING FAMILIES IN THE WAKE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The World Food Programme (WFP) is providing food assistance to nearly 150,000 people across the capital, Juba. Initially meant to meet people’s food needs, WFP now hopes the scheme will help cushion struggling families from the impact of the COVID19 pandemic.

Known as the Juba Urban Programme, the initiative has been revamped to
ensure compliance to COVID-19 preventative measures and serves multiple purposes.

In addition to receiving cash or food, families gain new knowledge and skills in areas such as nutrition, hygiene, food handling and preservation.

South Sudan has been facing high levels of food insecurity. Some 6.5 million people - more than half the population - will be hungry at the height of the hunger season, between May and July.

This already high number of people-in-need is expected to rise even higher in rural and urban areas if the recent locust invasion consumes a large part of the next harvest and because of the economic impact COVID-19 can have on poor people living in cities when they cannot earn enough to afford food from the market.

Frequent hand washing helps people to keep clean and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Photo Credit: WFP

**BASIC PROTECTIVE MEASURES AGAINST COVID-19**

Stay Aware of the Latest Information on the COVID-19 outbreak available on the WHO website.


Most people who become infected experience mild illness and recover, but it can be more severe for others. Take care of your health and protect others by doing the following:

- Wash your hands frequently
- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.
- Why? Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

- Maintain social distancing
- Maintain at least 1-meter (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Why? When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
- Practice respiratory hygiene
- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.