



COVID-19 highlights the need for greater support for global health systems Research snapshot¹

High-income countries with strong health systems have implemented public health responses to protect their populations from the outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Concern for

countries with weaker systems led the World Health Organization to declare this outbreak a public health emergency of international concern to try to limit the virus from spreading to densely populated countries with weaker health systems. Since the first case of COVID-19 in Africa was confirmed in Egypt, many people in African countries are asking how health systems will cope if COVID-19 affects them.

The author argues that the effectiveness of a health system is complex and goes beyond a country's financial resources. Although providing international funding and laboratory resources are essential, this will not immediately translate into an effective public health response. The global emergency response must equip those countries with weaker health systems with greater strategic guidance, which covers preparedness, implementation tools, and capacity-building in healthcare systems. Indonesia, for example, has to date not diagnosed any COVID-2019 infections, but commentators have questioned the

likelihood of there being none, given Indonesia's close proximity and travel connections to China. Indonesia's current diagnostic capability may not be sufficient for a large and geographically diverse island nation.

Low and middle-income settings with weaker healthcare systems will need more guidance. This applies to every level in the system. Other necessary measures include speeding up bureaucratic processes; increasing capacity of central hospitals with skilled responders; scaling up provision of personal protective equipment and education for healthcare staff so that they are prepared and have the resilience to act as immediate responders; and supporting access to, and best practice management and processing of, diagnostics, contact tracing, and quarantine capability. This outbreak marks a vital moment when countries with expertise need to work together and share information with countries that lack the means to respond effectively.

¹ Keerti Gedela. Covid-19 highlights the need for greater support for global health systems. The BMJ Opinion. Published online February 25, 2020. <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/02/25/keerti-gedela-coronavirus-outbreak-highlights-need-greater-support-global-health-systems/>



An airlift of medical items donated by Italian Cooperation and the Chinese community in Italy to Beijing, China for the coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency response

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Looming threat of COVID-19 infection in Africa: act collectively, and fast Research snapshot¹

Because of the high volume of air traffic and trade between China and Africa, Africa is at high risk of the introduction and spread of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). With neither treatment nor vaccines and without pre-existing immunity, the effect could be devastating due to weak healthcare systems and the multiple health challenges the continent already faces. A report by Gilbert and colleagues (2019) in *The Lancet* identifies each African country's risk of importation of COVID-19 from China, using data on the volume of air travel from three airports in provinces in China to African countries. Looking at preparedness and vulnerability, the authors determine the capacity of countries to detect and respond to cases.

Using information from this report, the authors propose a framework of action to prepare the continent for any potential importation and spread of COVID-19. Actions include: 1) set up a unified, continent-wide strategy for preparedness and response, including scaling up diagnostic testing (as testing becomes more available, it is possible that more cases might be detected); 2) ensure com-

mitted political will to act fast and collectively (the potential social, economic and security devastation that COVID-19 could cause should be sufficient incentive for governments to invest immediately in preparedness for the worst-case scenario); 3) commit and release financial resources from partners and donors to anticipate demand and address supply-chain management, mapping and stockpiling of COVID-19 response needs (supplies of these items will be limited in Africa because of reduced manufacturing capacity); 4) cooperate and collaborate to optimise limited supplies; 5) develop and put in place proper quarantine and infection-control protocols, including procedures for implementing social distancing (mass gathering and potential closure of public facilities); and 6) intensify capacity-building training efforts (medical staff at major hospitals must be trained in the proper protocols of quarantining individuals who are at risk of COVID-19 infection, as well as isolation and safe treatment of patients who test positive). The window of opportunity to act is narrowing. Africa needs to be supported to act now, and needs to act fast.

Children participate in a coronavirus prevention campaign at Ansar-ud-deen mosque in Itire, Lagos State, Nigeria



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¹ John N Nkengasong and Wessam Mankoula. 2020. Looming threat of COVID-19 infection in Africa: act collectively, and fast. *Comment. The Lancet*. Published Online February 27, 2020. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30464-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30464-5).

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