

## The second wave of COVID-19 in Africa: The need for enhanced preparedness

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### Abstract

Provision of financial resources through government authorities, private individuals, non-governmental organizations, and civil-based organizations will result in a large pool of financial resources needed to procure material resources and supplies to tackle the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa. Adequate engagement of community leaders, civil-based organizations, opinion leaders, and community-based associations, as well as dissemination of COVID-19-related information, would enhance behavioral change communication in preparing for the second wave of COVID-19. Decentralization of COVID-19 testing centers to communities enhances proximity to residential areas, a factor likely to improve uptake of COVID-19 tests in Africa. Pooled testing could optimize available resources for ascertaining the true prevalence of COVID-19 from selected individuals in different geographical areas. Adequate nutrition should be emphasized upon in health facilities, schools, and on the media for all population groups. It is also required that the government in countries across the African countries invest largely in agriculture via the provision of agricultural subsidies and loans to farmers who intend practicing mechanized farming in ensuring adequate food supply. The efforts above should also be used in ensuring continued interest in the COVID-19 vaccine, as well as its availability and uptake.

**KEY WORDS:** Africa; Coronavirus; COVID-19 pandemic; COVID-19 vaccines; preventive measures; public health.

## INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern on 11th February 2020 shortly after its emergence in Wuhan city, China in 2019 [1, 2]. On the African continent, the index case of COVID-19 was recorded in Egypt on the 12th February 2020, and 3,754,326 COVID-19 cases have been recorded in Africa of the 109,206,497 cases recorded globally as of 18th February 2021 [3, 4]. Implemented COVID-19 containment and control measures included immediate closure of borders and travel restrictions across various countries and institution of lockdown, all of which have had economic implications [5, 6]. Gradual suspension of lockdown activities was commenced in August 2020 [7]. The second wave of COVID-19 is sweeping across the globe, an event for which adequate response is a priority. This commentary, therefore, aimed to elucidate the need for enhanced preparedness and strategies therein for the African continent in responding to the second wave of COVID-19.

## DISCUSSION

### *The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa*

There have been several projections of a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic based on various scientific-based evidence several months ago [6]. However, this has now become a reality as many countries around the globe have had the experience of the second wave of COVID-19. Presently, some countries such as Nigeria are approaching the end of the second wave, while the experience is still trending in other countries such as Namibia [7,8]. In lieu of this, African countries have again implemented various control measures such as mass testing, COVID-19 certification for international travelers, testing on arrival, and increased advocacy for the adoption and continued practice of the use of face masks, regular hand hygiene, and social distancing.

The reality of the burden of the second wave in developed countries with better health care system structure and better economy is

### TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

*To tackle the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, enhanced preparedness and large pool of financial resources needed to procure material resources and supplies are required. Adequate community engagement would enhance behavioral change. There is also a need for aggressive efforts to ensure adequate food supply.*

**Competing interests** - none declared.

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a wake-up call for the African continent. The weak healthcare system and poor economy in many African countries cannot afford to manage the potential challenges inherent in a second wave of COVID-19 [10]. Research has shown the importance of adequate testing in the control of the COVID-19 outbreak. However, the rate of testing is declining across many African countries, and there is anecdotal evidence regarding the sub-optimal compliance rate to the use of face masks and other public health safety measures [10, 11]. Such fatigue in the COVID-19 response could hinder the success of the outbreak control efforts. For this cause, strategies for improving Africa's preparedness for the second wave of COVID-19 need to be implemented.

### *Strategies for improving Africa's preparedness for the second wave of COVID-19*

Inadequate financial resources during the COVID-19 pandemic could be a log in the wheel for adequate preparedness of many African countries in preparing for the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, optimization of financial resources needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic should be promptly addressed [12]. The provision of financial resources through government authorities, private individuals, non-governmental organizations, and civil-based organizations will result in a large pool of financial resources needed to procure material resources and supplies to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the pool of financial resources will enable timely payment of healthcare workers who are actively participating in the COVID-19 outbreak response either at isolation centers or elsewhere [13]. The financial capacity for state-wide or nationwide testing may be lacking due to the poor economic state in many African countries, however, pooled testing could optimize available resources for estimating the true prevalence of COVID-19 from selected individuals in different geographical areas. In addition, pooled testing enhances the validation of the specificity and sensitivity of diagnostic testing equipment, such as the Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction

which is more affordable for many African countries. A review of COVID-19 pooled testing demonstrated by the Ghanaian government could also provide insight for the development of strategies and suitable modalities for practicalizing pooled testing for suitability in each country [11]. Moreover, rapid testing requires significant consideration while the second wave of COVID-19 is ongoing. Decentralization of COVID-19 testing centers to communities enhances proximity to residential areas, a factor likely to improve uptake of COVID-19 tests [12, 13]. Taking Nigeria as a case study, COVID-19 tests are currently being conducted for all travelers. It is also rewarding that all individuals especially the vulnerable groups in the population get tested. Total testing is aimed at early diagnosis of COVID-19-positive individuals who may or may not be symptomatic. It also helps to commence early management of these individuals while minimizing the risk for onward transmission of COVID-19. In addition, the services of community-based health workers such as community pharmacists and patent medicine vendors as well as community stakeholders would improve contact tracing of suspected and probable COVID-19 cases in a bid to commencing timely management.

Non-adherence to the recommended precautionary measures such as the use of face masks, physical distancing, and hand hygiene using soap and clean water, or alcohol-based hand rubs has been observed across many settings in African communities [1]. This is therefore the time to start making advocacy for adaptation of the behavioral change that are necessary for the control of COVID-19 in Nigeria. Adequate engagement of community leaders, civil-based organizations, opinion leaders, and community-based associations cannot be over-emphasized in behavioral change communication [13]. When community stakeholders are knowledgeable about COVID-19 preventive measures and its purposes, community members across the African continent can be reached with substantial COVID-19-related information. The dissemination of information via the different

channels of information enhances the communication of COVID-19 information on a wide coverage [1].

It has been reported that one-fourth of the global population have underlying medical conditions mostly non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which increase their susceptibility to the risk of being infected with COVID-19 [14]. Notable spikes in COVID-19 mortality rates have also been linked to NCDs. To adequately prepare for the second wave of COVID-19, management of NCDs should be integrated into the national COVID-19 response, while enhancing access to essential health services [13]. In addition, scaled-up diagnosis, and care for individuals with NCDs should be ensured. Prioritization of health care workers in the COVID-19 vaccine coverage should be ensured. Furthermore, integration of the prospective COVID-19 vaccine into the routine immunization schedule would strengthen the health system, improve uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine, and improve the health of all persons living on the African continent [15].

'We are what we eat', so goes an old-time adage. Many cases of COVID-19 infection have been traced to poor immunity secondary to the consumption of less-nutritious foods. In a bid to adequately prepare for the second wave of COVID-19, adequate nutrition should be emphasized upon both in health facilities, schools, and on the media for all population groups [16]. The high proportion of farmers in many African countries presents the opportunity for consuming fresh farm produce which are likely to reduce the risk for NCDs, a known risk factor for COVID-19. In lieu of this, it is required that the government in

countries across the African countries invest largely in agriculture via the provision of agricultural subsidies and loans to farmers who intend practicing mechanized farming [17]. Damaged grain reserves should be replaced to enable storage of food produce and prevent unnecessary wastage of food items which would be needed in latter days. When storage reserves are adequately utilized, timely distribution of palliatives such as food items would reduce the exposure of individuals to the risk of COVID-19 infection while going about their daily activities. To overcome a repeat of the dire economic challenges faced by many during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, hence the need for enhanced preparedness and aggressive efforts for adequate food supply to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic on the African continent.

## CONCLUSION

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has commenced across different regions of the globe, and adequate preparedness is highly required in Africa, a continent characterized by weak health system and poor economic capacity. To ensure an enlargement of the capacity of African countries in the COVID-19 response strategy, a review of innovations that were deployed during the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak is required. Knowledge obtained from such review activity would be needful to strengthen each African country as well as the entire African continent against the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, advocacy for behavioral change communication in the COVID-19 context in Africa would keep the spread of COVID-19 within limits and promote vaccine uptake.

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