INTERNEWS COVID-19 MEDIA BULLETIN
Reporting on COVID-19 in South Sudan

December 18, 2020

SITUATION UPDATE

Cases of COVID-19 infections and deaths continue to rise in many countries around the world (Source: WHO). In particular in Europe, countries are being particularly hard hit and are reinstating partial or total lockdowns (see the map below, with the orange color indicating the countries that are currently have the highest number of case notification, via ECDC).

However, the commencement of vaccinations against COVID-19 in some countries is giving hope that the pandemic could eventually be contained. During a COVID-19 briefing at WHO headquarters in Geneva, Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus applauded the fact Britain was already vaccinating its citizens (see more here: New York Times) and that Canada, the United States and others are in the process of doing the same (Source: WHO).

The World Health Organization says there is a need for action and money to ensure coronavirus vaccines are available around the world as they get approvals for use. “We have all seen images of people being vaccinated against COVID-19. We want to see these same images all over the world, and that will be a true sign of solidarity,” the WHO director said (Source: Eye Radio).

Despite the efforts to contain the surging numbers of COVID-19, some people continue to stigmatize people wearing masks in public or families and continue to deny the existence of the virus. Resistance to comply is posing a serious challenge to the response's effectiveness. Dr. Dumba Samuel, a contact tracer states: “Unfortunately, the bigger percentage of cases end up rejecting the results and insist that they are negative. Others switch off their phones while some provide wrong numbers. We are not able to reach a big number of suspected cases”.

This section was written by Akiiki Tusiime, Internews’ Communication and Community Engagement Technical Advisor.

Case count & stats

South Sudan | cumulative cases: 3,228
New cases: +3 | Deaths: 62 | Recovered: 3,050
Source: Ministry of Health, 16 December 2020

Africa | cumulative cases: 2,443,850
New cases: +21,275 | Deaths: 57,414 | Recovered: 2,066,966
Source: WHO, Worldometer, 16 December 2020

Global | cumulative cases: 74,516,681
New cases: +716,602 | Deaths: 1,654,507 | Recovered: 52,360,935
Source: WHO, Worldometer, 16 December 2020

If you want to contribute to this media bulletin or have information to share, please contact:
Tusiime Wilfred Romeo, atusiime@internews.org or Dr. Michael Gubay, mgubay@internews.org
Internews welcomes feedback, comments and suggestions from all media receiving this newsletter and invites all of them to forward, share and re-post this newsletter as widely as possible.
This bi-weekly bulletin is designed for and by media partners, journalists and other interested stakeholders in South Sudan reporting and working on COVID-19, and other related health and development challenges. It shares citizen concerns on COVID-19 and the humanitarian response, provides verified information about health measures of the Ministry of Health and partners and profiles trustworthy (re)sources and responses. It also shares citizen concerns on COVID-19 and the humanitarian response.

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**IN NUMBERS:**

**Feedback collected**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rumors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complaints</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Suggestions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total: 220 unique feedback points

Analysis based on feedback collected indicated that there were more rumors gathered from Lakes State and that Northern Bahr el Ghazal had more concerns about COVID-19 that other parts of the country. Central Equatoria had more concerns and suggestions about COVID-19 related issues than any other part of South Sudan. The state with the least rumors was Eastern Equatoria.

**More frequent feedback**

**Underage Pregnancies**

“Closure of schools has affected children badly. Under-aged pregnancies in greater Equatoria and other parts of the country when schools were operating such things were not too many.”

Male, Renk, Upper Nile State

“The effect the closure has caused, many of our girls have been impregnated. This statement is true. The ministry of health brought a lot of statistics in Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal regions. We got all this information. But it is us parents to set our rules to protect our daughters.”

Male - Mauna, Juba

**Transport and COVID-19**

“People do not hear what the Ministry of Health or the people are talking about especially when the stages are overcrowded with passengers. They will just board even if you tell them the vehicle is full. They say we don't mind about coronavirus. Some say if corona is there, does it mean we cannot go the market?”

Male - Taxi driver – Bullen, Juba

“The bad thing is people are not taking protective measures due to the financial crisis. In fact, we should have water can from washing hands. But sometimes we will not get water, even soap is not there. So in fact God is the one protecting us. But all in all, we should not put God to protect us we need to put preventing measures.”

Male - Taxi Driver Juba

**Shisha**

“Women are still sharing shisha, yet all heard about coronavirus being spread by sharing some material which is held by infected persons.”

Female, UN House Juba

**Awareness**

“Why is government allowing wrestling competitions to take place in Juba and other sports activities, yet coronavirus is still spreading? Permission of such activities is confusing us especially when the same government comes back to us and talks about physical distancing and all that. Why does government allow sports and wrestling events that allow hundreds or even thousands of fans to congregate?”

Male, Mingkaman

“I didn't know behavior changes happens very fast. Can you image my grandmother chased her grandchild yesterday after a series of sneezes? She was like, "get away from me, am too early to die of other diseases leave alone Coronavirus." We collapsed into laughter and said, 'this coronavirus has taught everybody a lesson.'”

Mangar Pakal, Bahr el Ghazal

“Why is government allowing wrestling competitions to take place in Juba and other sports activities, yet coronavirus is still spreading? Permission of such activities is confusing us especially when the same government comes back to us and talks about physical distancing and all that. Why does government allow sports and wrestling events that allow hundreds or even thousands of fans to congregate?”

Male, Mingkaman

“My message to our people is that, let us respect health guidelines recommended by the ministry of health and World Health Organization. That is the only way for us for containing the virus.”

Male - Tuk, Mingkaman

Lakes State
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IN FOCUS

Children and COVID-19

CDC reports: “While fewer children have been sick with COVID-19 compared to adults, children can be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, can get sick from COVID-19, and can spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to others. Children, like adults, who have COVID-19 but have no symptoms (“asymptomatic”) can still spread the virus to others” (Source: CDC).

Most children with COVID-19 have mild symptoms or have no symptoms at all. However, some children can get severely ill from COVID-19. They might require hospitalization, intensive care, or a ventilator to help them breathe. In rare cases, they might die, reports CDC (Source: CDC).

CDC and other health partners are also investigating a rare but serious medical condition associated with COVID-19 in children called Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). We do not yet know what causes MIS-C and who is at increased risk for developing it (Source: CDC).

Pregnancy and COVID-19

WHO reports that they still do not know if a pregnant woman with COVID-19 can pass the virus to her fetus or baby during pregnancy or delivery. To date, the active virus has not been found in samples of fluid around the baby in the womb or breastmilk (Source: WHO).

Pregnant women or recently pregnant women who are older, overweight, and have pre-existing medical conditions such as hypertension and diabetes seem to have an increased risk of developing severe COVID-19. When pregnant women develop severe disease, they also seem to more often require care in intensive care units than non-pregnant women of reproductive age (Source: WHO).

Due to changes in their bodies and immune systems, we know that pregnant women can be badly affected by some respiratory infections. It is therefore important that they take precautions to protect themselves against COVID-19, and report possible symptoms (including fever, cough or difficulty in breathing) to their healthcare provider (Source: WHO).

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IN FOCUS

What are we hearing in Lakes State?

"I can agree with this radio station that teaching about the COVID 19 has changed most of the population. However, some people don’t have access to the radios. Now how can you enable the person in the village without radio get the information?"

Maper, Lakes

"Is COVID-19 Sexual Transmitted Disease?"

Male, Rumbek

Sex and COVID-19

There is currently no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted through semen or vaginal fluids, but the virus has been detected in the semen of people who have or are recovering from the virus. Further research is needed to determine if COVID-19 could be transmitted sexually.

However, close contact (within 2 meters) with an infected person can expose you to the virus — whether you’re engaged in sexual activity or not. The virus spreads by respiratory droplets released when someone with the virus coughs, sneezes or talks. Coming into contact with a person’s spit through kissing or other sexual activities could expose you to the virus.

People who have COVID-19 could also spread respiratory droplets onto their skin and personal belongings. A sexual partner could get the virus by touching these surfaces and then touching his or her mouth, nose or eyes.

Since some people who have COVID-19 show no symptoms, it’s important to keep distance between yourself and others if the COVID-19 virus is spreading in your community. This includes avoiding sexual contact with anybody who doesn’t live with you. (Source: Mayo Clinic).

Information sources

55% of South Sudanes live beyond walking distance to a clinic (Source: South Sudan Health). People that don’t get access to the radio can still learn from trusted sources in their community. Community Health Workers (CHWs) are often critical first line information providers and can help people without a radio understand disease and health information.

Community health workers are more than health staff: they are community mobilizers, educators, and trusted residents of the areas they serve. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, they’re helping to share important messages about health and hygiene, as well as social distancing (Source: Reliefweb).

Read an example of a success story on the effectiveness on community health workers’ fight on COVID-19 from Action Against Hunger here. In journalism, solution-based stories focus on stories that explore how problems can be solved, and how people solve them. Learn more about this type of journalism here.

Media contacts:

For more information on community health workers: https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/webform/contact-our-press-team

For more information on reproductive health in South Sudan: UN House, Building #4, Yei Road Juba, Republic of South Sudan southsudan@unfpa.org

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IN FOCUS

What are we hearing in Northern Bahr el Ghazal?

“Since the closure of schools our sisters and colleagues have become pregnant. This has angered me a lot. I had a colleague who is very intelligent. She got pregnant. She said it was because of poverty.”

Male Youth – Wau, Bahr el Ghazal

“Since the outbreak of COVID-19 a lot has changed in the way we live. People are not allowed to gather in big numbers and are not one allowed to walk freely without putting on a facemask. COVID-19 has affected our economy, the way we travel, the schools, the churches and many other more things. We call upon the Ministry and their partners to help the community increasing the levels of awareness on COVID-19 to help stop the spread of the virus.”

Adult Female – Aweil, Northern Bahr el Ghazal

Solution focused journalism

Solution focused journalism is not about endorsing any particular solution but is about the reporting of responses to problems alongside the problems themselves - not only looking at what has happened but also at ways to improve the future (Source: BBC).

Consider this story from Save the Children, for example. The NGO wrote: “Disruption due to COVID-19 in Sierra Leone could lead to 23,000 extra teenage pregnancies by the end of the year (…). To combat this, the organisation has launched an innovative, interactive game app for boys and girls which provides reliable information on sexual health as well as how to stay safe from the coronavirus”.

In Sierra Leone – like in South Sudan – online misinformation on sex and sexuality contributes to high rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, especially in urban areas. The app aimed to fill this gap by offering reliable information to help young people understand sexual health and make decisions that will protect them. It also shows them where they can find support in their community (Source: SCI). Such innovative solutions are also found in South Sudan and could be reported on.

Teenage pregnancy

Worldvision published a report which highlighted how teenage pregnancy has increased significantly during the COVID-19 outbreak. It stated: “this report spotlights one particular vulnerability that is known to be exacerbated by school closures in times of crisis and risks the continued education of vulnerable children: teenage pregnancy” (Source: World Vision). In September 2020, it was reported that 1,500 teenage girls in South Sudan have either been married off or impregnated since April this year, according to the Support Peace Development Initiative Organisation (SPIDO) (Source: Development Diaries). Teenage pregnancy is further linked to lack of health education and services, child marriage, and increased poverty and insecurity. Complications from teenage pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death of girls aged 15 to 19 years worldwide (Source: World Vision).

Media contacts:

media@savethechildren.org.uk

https://www.worldvision.org/about-us/media-contacts

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Juba - Last week an herbalist in the capital city Juba reported he has successfully been treating patients diagnosed with multiple diseases including COVID-19. The 57-year-old traditional healer from Sudan says he has been helping patients for more than ten years. For the past 7 months, he stated, he has also been helping patient with symptoms of the COVID-19 virus.

Traditional medicine is popular in South Sudan: some people in Juba mentioned that local herbs are cheaper than biomedical medicine bought in pharmacies. Other people are used to them - traditionally herbs, and alternative treatments, have long been the only sources of treatment, particularly during the conflict.

Miss Flora, a resident of Kator Payam in Central Equatoria severely suffered from signs and symptoms which resembled COVID-19 isolated herself for more than 21 days. She said she local herbs, which she says, has helped her recover from her illness.

COVID-19 is mainly spread during close contact between people with the signs and symptoms of the virus; and are transmitted via small droplets produced during coughing, sneezing. These small droplets may be produced during breathing - but the virus is not considered to be airborne. People may also catch COVID-19 by touching objects, which have been contaminated by an ill person.

When his patients got ill, Yusuf Mohammed Ali continued to treat them. The local herbalist says he believes it is possible to treat the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 with traditional medicine.

Another healer, Mohammed Abdullah, who has 23 years of experience as an herbalist treating different types of diseases says: “I believe there are herbs that can treat COVID-19 as it is just like the flu”. He has been successfully treating patients during the pandemic, he says.

Currently there is no scientific proof that traditional medicine can cure COVID-19. It has not been proven, but also not disproven, that traditional medicine can cure or help treat COVID-19.

To get more clarity on the matter, the Regional Expert Committee on Traditional Medicine for COVID-19 formed by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Africa CDC and the African Union Commission for Social Affairs has endorsed a protocol for phase III clinical trials of herbal medicine for COVID-19.

“Just like other areas of medicine, sound science is the sole basis for safe and effective traditional medicine therapies,” said Dr Tumusiime, Director of Universal Health Coverage and Life Course Cluster at WHO Regional Office for Africa in a press release of the WHO.

Medical doctor Ochalla Augustine, however, warns the public about taking local herbs against COVID-19. Taking traditional medicine has actually been advised against in many contexts because doctors don’t know if traditional medicine cures or even worsens health outcomes in patients. As such, it is best to seek professional medical care of licensed health care workers in hospitals if you have a fever, a cough, and difficulty breathing. Call in advance, advises WHO (2020).

The Ministry of Health and World Health Organization recommend preventive measures including hand washing, covering one’s mouth when coughing or sneezing, maintaining social distance and self-isolation for people who might be sick.

Before you read this article, please do note that WHO has confirmed that there currently is no scientific proof that traditional medicine can cure COVID-19.

Whilst local herbs are a popular in Juba, medical doctors based in the capital city are concerned about the actual effectiveness of the cure for COVID-19 and warn against taking traditional medicine for the respiratory disease.

By Denis Morris Mimbugbe, SAMA FM
December 18, 2020

**“Remember a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”**

*Diana James, secondary school student from Juba, South Sudan (listener of SAMA FM)*

How young people can work with their government and civil society organizations to respond to the impact of COVID-19 and build a stronger post-pandemic economic and social system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only caused havoc in our societies but has disrupted every aspect of our people’s lives in an unprecedented manner. This pandemic has caused psychological distress among our societies, socially but also economically. COVID-19 lockdowns have impacted young people negatively, especially school-going girls: many girls have been impregnated, crimes such as rape, robbery and all forms of violence did indeed increase drastically because of the economic crisis.

And because young people has made it to the large population globally, they are change makers who are participating more in shaping social movements and playing crucial role in ensuring that social agenda’s and developmental approaches are resilient so, the government has to free young people’s voices and stop manipulating them because they are the eyes and pillars in our societies.

Through the help of donations from organizations to fight COVID-19, the government can send young people to societies at the grass root level to create awareness on the prevention measures on COVID-19 in places like schools, markets, churches, streets and many others. Working close with the Minister of Health and partners, young people can create groups to reach out to the communities by supplying masks, hand-washing containers and sanitizers, and by being youth advocates in the local media and by creating discussions on how to recover the damage economics and adopt to a new life.

To elaborate more, young people should continue giving hopes to their communities and institutions can help by involving them in radio talk shows, getting their opinions on the impacts of COVID-19 in their daily lives, also inviting comedians to make funs because laughter and smiles gives hopes.

Furthermore, the government and organizations could help young people by conducting workshops and seminars to women and girls focused on making masks locally and soaps to provide them with critical income during lockdowns. This also helps to protect the wider society: because the use of masks significantly reduced the risk of getting COVID-19. Educating young people on preventive strategies can help them educate their families because charity begins at home.

In all what I have mentioned above needs co-operation and good relationships especially among the civil society, young people, the governments and organizations so that they can work together. Because the big problem we face is as follows: what is logical is not always practical, what is practical is not always ethical, what is ethical is not always right. And, in addition what is right is not always desired, don’t forget what is desired takes us back to what is not logical.

The prolonged use of medical masks can be uncomfortable. However, it does not lead to CO2 intoxication nor oxygen deficiency. While wearing a medical mask, make sure it fits properly and that it is tight enough to allow you to breathe normally. Do not re-use a disposable mask and always change it as soon as it gets damp.

**FACT:** The prolonged use of medical masks* when properly worn, DOES NOT cause CO2 intoxication nor oxygen deficiency.

*Medical masks (also known as surgical masks) are flat or pleated; they are affixed to the head with straps or have ear loops.

#Coronavirus  #COVID19

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The COVID-19 Beat Updates from our media partners:

→ **Bakhita FM** – the radio station reported on the perception of the public on the personal risk in South Sudan, with a specific focus on how suspected patients have been treated or handled in the communities. People reported to belief that the government was supposed to establish a specific quarantine center where victims and suspects meant to be placed to separate them from the rest of the community.

→ **Capital FM** – reported on various aspects of the outbreak:

  - They stated that churches had to temporarily suspend their activities and find new ways of reaching out to congregations and the most vulnerable. Churches expanded existing worship to online networks or established new services online using different forms of social media, and radio. Several churches reported the positive effects of ‘going online’ as an opportunity for creativity and the ability to reach audiences outside of the usual physical gatherings.

  - The station also reported that authorities in Juba City Council set guidelines on transport organizations, park managers, conductors’ travelers and individuals MUST undergo temperature screening.

  - The ministry of Education has provided online and on-air platform for “Learning At Home.” But it’s not so easy for many parents: “Learning from home sparked a range of early concerns. Top among them: What role are parents and school administration expected to play in their children’s remote education while balancing life’s other demands?”

  - The Government with the help of international community create awareness, campaign, and availed Toll-Free Number 6666 to support response however, the public including the religious leader attributed the number to evil encroachment and anti-Christ work. This has negatively impacted the response operation of the COVID-task force.

  - According to a debate conducted by capital FM on air, women are more likely than men to take COVID-19 seriously and comply with mitigation efforts.

The station also hosted survivors on air, reported on learning from home, home based care, and shared that this is a time to show solidarity with one another, to practice love and self-discipline, to hold back from unnecessary physical contact yet remain connected in different ways.

→ **EYE Radio** - In November, Eye radio hosted two community leaders: Tokiman Payam Acting Chief Tartisio and Abdalla David, community and religious leader from ECSS to discuss health protocols against COVID-19 in gatherings including funerals. Additionally, Eye Radio’s COVID-19 Special hosted three contact tracers to share their experiences doing the work. As Dr. Lokoya Innocent reported: “The challenges we are finding relevant to this point is that most of our community, with the economic difficulty how can they feed their children. For us to engage them is very difficult. We have to assure them that people are working and people who will be engaged will be helped because we need to create a good environment for all.” Eye radio also reported on child abuses during COVID-19.

*Continue on page 9*
The COVID-19 Beat Updates from our media partners:

- **Voice of Reconciliation** - discussed why it is important to isolate when the person tested positive for COVID-19 or suspected of the disease. The station also demonstrated the importance of wearing a face mask during group discussions when students are revising their books at home; and reminded parents how important it is for them to visit the schools of their children to check how preventative measures of coronavirus are being following in school.

- **The Radio Community** reported that learners need to be careful because COVID can spread easily, and they need to put on facemask every time they move around the school premises. On their episode of COVID19 Hour, the station hosted a live discussion on COVID19 effect on economy with Paul Thon Mapiou, economist and a businesman in Mingkaman. Thon says they are no longer accessing essential items outside the country, forcing private sector entities to operate with very little profit.

- **SAMA FM** reported on the psychological distress of young people negatively, especially school going girls. They also reported on how patient of COVID-19 are being treated in the John Garang Infectious Disease Unit. They discussed what is needed from the patient, are the relatives supposed to visit, what kind of samples that are taken for testing and what are the process of reintegration of the patient back to the communities Miss Jane Kiden Jackson, the acting director for women, peace and security in the Directorate of Gender Child Social Welfare was also on the radio and reported that the guidelines of COVID-19 restrict many women from doing their normal daily business.

- **UN House** discussed the impact of COVID-19 on religious gatherings with a Pastor and four other Church members from different denominations: “Initially, we had tried to ignore the rules of the Government by saying God is the one protecting his people but later, we fear the death of Christians in European countries. Now we are keeping social distancing and using masks in the Churches”. The Boda Boda Talk Talk group also discussed if whether animals transmit COVID-19 to humans or not.

We are all being exposed to a huge amount of COVID-19 information on a daily basis, and not all of it is reliable. Here are some tips for telling the difference and stopping the spread of misinformation.

Credit: World Health Organization (2020)
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Capacity building opportunities:

Scholarship for online classes

Journalists from several developing countries can apply for a scholarship to attend media courses. The Radio Nederland Training Centre (RNTC), sponsored by the Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP), offers scholarships for its online classes. Courses include “Media campaigns for development and social change,” “Producing media to counter disinformation,” “Media campaigns for advocacy” and “Public interest journalism.” Deadline 29 December 2020. See here.

Four-week course in Arabic on Journalism in a Pandemic

Journalists covering the pandemic are invited to participate in this four-week course in Arabic, Russian, English, Spanish, Portuguese and French. The Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, through its Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), has made available the course “Journalism in a pandemic: Covering COVID-19 now and in the future” in self-directed format. See here.

Internews update:

In South Sudan, the MoH and other health implementing partners continue ramping up efforts to improve the COVID-19 response. This week we share some positive impacts of our activities:

Talking to Internews, Dr. Thuou Loi Cingoth, Ministry of Health, said that highlighting the efforts of all partners in the COVID-19 response is a positive turn: “I appreciate the support and collaboration between Internews, the Ministry of Health, the WHO, the journalists and other partners for their contribution towards the Lugara Media Bulletin. The Lugara Bulletin is very informative, and I recommend that it be shared widely,” said Dr. Loi.

Dr. Pinyi, IGAD representative at the MOH, received a copy of the Lugara and said no partner have ever done this: “I appreciate internews for sharing the document with me. I feel recognized. We partner with many organizations, but none has done this. Internews is the first and am grateful and I feel honored. This is what other partners should do.”

For more information, please contact Dr. Michael Gubay – mgubay@internews.org

Can people wear masks while exercising?

People should NOT wear masks when exercising as masks may reduce the ability to breathe comfortably.

Sweat can make the mask become wet more quickly which makes it difficult to breathe and promotes the growth of microorganisms.

The important preventive measure during exercise is to maintain physical distance of at least one meter from others.

#Coronavirus #COVID19

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