



AFRICA HEALTH
ORGANISATION

AHO President Statement: COVID-19 and Africa

COVID-19 knows no borders. It is impacting every country and threatens the health, lives, and livelihoods of people around the world. What started as a health challenge is now also developing into an economic crisis. Over the past five months, the coronavirus pandemic has spread to more than 100 countries and has pushed our world into what I call “virgin territory”.

Although Africa is the least-affected region globally in terms of the number of cases and death reported, the race to prepare is on. We have been monitoring COVID-19 in Africa since it was first detected on the continent back in mid-February 2020. As of 17 June 2020, our analysis suggests that the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases from 55 African countries has reached 259,110, with 7,017 deaths.

To date, Africa has just 1.5% of the world’s reported cases of COVID-19, and less than 0.1 percent of the world’s deaths. However, these numbers do not paint the full picture. Based on our data, ten out of the 55 countries are driving the rise in numbers, accounting for nearly 80% of all the cases. More than 70% of the deaths are taking place in only five countries: South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Algeria, and Ghana. South Africa is the most affected, accounting for 25% of the continent’s total cases. South Africa has reported 76,334 cases, with 1,625. Other most-affected countries include Egypt (47,856 cases), Nigeria (17,148), Algeria (11,147), and Ghana (12,193).

Thankfully, Africa appears to have so far been spared the scale of outbreaks we have seen in other regions. Africa’s knowledge, and experience of suppressing infectious diseases has been critical to rapidly scaling up an agile response to COVID-19. Countries across Africa have garnered a great deal of experience from tackling infectious diseases like polio, measles, Ebola, yellow fever, influenza, and many more. Moreover, early response by African countries show promise that numbers will remain low. But if we lose sight of continuous monitoring, COVID-19 could easily overwhelm our region’s health facilities.

While COVID-19, thus far, seems controlled, the continent’s ability to test for the virus remains limited, which could hinder primary care health workers from being able to identify those with the virus. Despite this, we at AHO have also kept track of the recoveries made in the region. Current management of the pandemic gives hope, especially when we look at South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, and Algeria. These countries were amongst the most affected.

Many assumed that Europe and North America would cope, while Africa would be swamped. The data collected at AHO indicates that the opposite has occurred. It is possible that our region’s youth is paying dividend and contributing to fewer deaths. But now is not the time to be lulled into complacency. We must remain vigilant and continue positive progress. I want to reemphasise that our health systems are fragile and could cripple with a sudden surge in cases.

In the end, there is no telling how long it will take to bring the COVID-19 coronavirus under control, or how many people will be affected. But AHO plans to work with African governments, in cooperation with communities and international actors, to take the steps now to limit the damage – and lay the foundations for a healthier, more resilient future.

Graciano Masauso, President

Written by [Zach Malik](#)

Office of the President, AHO Media Office, Harare, Zimbabwe, email: info@aho.org