



## PRESS RELEASE COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE COMUNICADO DE IMPRENSA



### **NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19), ECOWAS MINISTERS OF HEALTH IN EMERGENCY MEETING IN BAMAKO TO HARMONIZE AND COORDINATE REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

**Abuja, February 13, 2020** --- As part of its preparedness and response plan to the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) epidemic, the West African Health Organization (WAHO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Mali, is convening on February 14, 2020 in Bamako in Mali, a high-level regional coordination meeting to adopt a common preparedness approach for ECOWAS Member States.

Indeed, on 30 January 2020, the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 epidemic to be a public health emergency of international concern. The WHO also reports that the risk is very high in China and high at the regional and global levels, including in the ECOWAS region.

With regard to human-to-human transmission associated with rapid spread in a context of globalization, it is becoming urgent for each country to develop surveillance and diagnostic tools targeting the Novel coronavirus in order to better prepare the response to potential cases or outbreaks.

It is against this backdrop that WAHO is organizing this important forum in order to build the capacities of national and regional bodies in the ECOWAS region for the surveillance, prevention and early detection of Covid-19 epidemic.

The objective of this high-level meeting is to harmonize regional preparedness strategies for the prevention, early detection and control of Covid-19.

The Ministers of Health of the 15 ECOWAS Member States will seize this opportunity to assess regional and national preparedness in terms of surveillance, case management, infection prevention and control, laboratory and risk communication.

Their discussion will also include needs identification and the challenges related to this epidemic, as well as the provision of regional guidelines and orientations for the prevention, early detection and control of Covid-19.

It should be recalled that to date, no cases have been confirmed in the ECOWAS region. WAHO, through the Regional Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control (RCSDC), continues to coordinate with Member States to share real-time information on the outbreak, enhance communication between countries, and ensure countries' airport surveillance capacities are strengthened, particularly at the region's international airports with direct flights from China.

Finally, in collaboration with the African Centre for Disease Control (CDC), the number of regional reference laboratories dedicated to the diagnosis of coronaviruses is being increased from two to five in order to widen access to rapid biological diagnostic facilities by Member States. Laboratory personnel from four (4) Member States (The Gambia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria) have also been trained in the diagnosis of Covid-19 and equipped in collaboration with the Pasteur Institute in Dakar, Senegal.

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