



WAHO Providing Financial and Material Support to ECOWAS Member States to fight Covid-19

1 April 2020 – The Covid-19 pandemic is rapidly evolving in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region since the first case was reported from Lagos, Nigeria on 27 February 2020. As of yesterday, 31 March 2020, a total of 1,077 new confirmed cases and 31 deaths have been reported across all 15 Member States. Sierra Leone was the last country in the ECOWAS region to be affected and reported a confirmed Covid-19 case on 31 March 2020.

The West African Health Organization, WAHO has distributed over 30,000 diagnostic test kits to the 15 ECOWAS Member States and these were the first testing kits received by most of our countries, and we are also currently distributing 50,000 specimen transportation kits, 10,000 personal protective equipment (PPE), and some medications to Member States. Many States have received their allocation of diagnostic kits, but all the other support are expected to be delivered to the countries by DHL between 30 March and 7 April. We have placed orders for more diagnostic test kits and PPEs which we expect to arrive within the next 2 weeks. In addition, we are sourcing for ventilators which are equipment for supporting the breathing of severely ill patients in hospitals to distribute to countries. All these efforts are to supplement what individual countries are doing by themselves.

As the Institution designated by the highest authorities of ECOWAS to lead the coordination, collaboration and communication in the region with regards to Covid-19 pandemic, WAHO has been very active in bringing together Member States to adopt a regional approach to the pandemic and to support them as necessary. On 14 February 2020, a few days after the declaration by WHO of Covid-19 as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, The West African Health Organization, WAHO convened an emergency meeting of the Ministers of Health of ECOWAS on preparedness and response to the outbreak of Covid-19, the first region in Africa to do so. The meeting agreed on a unified regional approach to Covid-19, and we held media briefings on this in Bamako, Mali on 14 February 2020, and in Abuja, Nigeria on 17 February 2020.

WAHO immediately strengthened the capacity of all 15 member states to test for Covid-19 through a regional laboratory training and distribution of the first batch of diagnostic kits to all member states. We then conducted several other regional trainings on risk communication, emergency operations, and a simulation exercise for the regional rapid response teams. In all the 15 ECOWAS Member States, several actors including health workers are being mobilized to save lives. However, there continues to be the challenge of securing sufficient materials given the disruption in global supply chains. This is something WAHO is tackling through its partnership with other agencies and bodies to ensure we never run out of stock in the region.

Other key actions WAHO is taking to fight this Covid-19 pandemic is the development of Operational Guides for the fight against Covid-19 pandemic in the ECOWAS region; and an online training for healthcare workers on the use of these guides. The online training starts in the week of 6-12 April 2020.

About the West African Health Organization (WAHO): WAHO is the specialized institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) responsible for health issues. Its mission is to attain the highest possible standard and protection of health of the peoples in the sub-region through the harmonization of the policies of the Member States, pooling of resources, and cooperation with one another and with others for a collective and strategic fight against the health problems of the sub-region.

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However, the most important tool in this fight is the behavior of every citizen. It is of utmost importance that the citizens heed the information on how to protect themselves and their loved ones, and so stop the spread of the pandemic in their own community. Every citizen must:

- Regularly and thoroughly wash hands with soap and water, or if not possible clean them with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Limit the number of people with whom you are in contact each day and reduce physical contact to the minimum. Maintain at least 1.5 meter distance between yourself and anyone, do NOT shake hands, kiss or hug.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, particularly with unwashed hands since the virus easily infects the body through these areas.
- Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze; then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
- Avoid places of concentration of people, such as sports, cultural and religious gatherings. These events should be cancelled in all our communities.
- Stay home if you feel unwell, or if you feel you have come in contact with someone with Covid-19. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention following the directions of your local health authority.

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