

# Community Based Health Care and Immunization Activities During Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Short Communication

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## INTRODUCTION

Community-based health care is an important part of medical care within the least times; in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the distinct capacity of trusted community members for social engagement and delivering care where it's needed is ever more critical. This joint WHO, UNICEF and IFRC guidance addresses the role of community-based health care within the pandemic context. It includes practical recommendations for decision makers to help keep communities and health workers safe, to sustain essential services at the community level, and to ensure an effective response to COVID-19. Using this comprehensive and coordinated approach will help countries strengthen the resilience of community-based health services throughout the pandemic, into early recovery and beyond.

Community-based health care includes services delivered by a broadly defined community health workforce, according to their training and capacity, encompassing a range of health workers, lay and professional, formal and informal, paid and unpaid, as well as facility-based personnel who support and supervise them and provide outreach services and campaigns. Where applicable, specific occupational groups and their roles are highlighted. In every community, there are local actors, relationships and processes that intersect with the health sector and are central to delivering high-quality, people-centred health care and to building health system resilience. Relevant actors include local authorities, faith leaders and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups, such as women's, scouting and youth groups. As trusted members of the community, the community health workforce usually has strong ties with these groups.

Due to the global circulation of the virus causing COVID-19 and the current pandemic, there is risk of disruption to routine immunization activities due to both COVID-19 related burden on the health system and decreased demand for vaccination due to physical distancing requirements or community reluctance. Interruption of immunization services, even for brief periods, will end in increased numbers of susceptible individuals and lift the likelihood of outbreak-prone vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs) like measles.<sup>1</sup> Such VPD outbreaks may end in increased morbidity and mortality predominantly in young infants and other vulnerable groups, which may cause greater burden on health systems already strained by the COVID-19 response. The high potential for VPD outbreaks makes it imperative for countries to take care of continuity of immunization services wherever services are often conducted under safe conditions. Prior disease outbreaks and humanitarian emergencies have underscored the importance of maintaining essential health services like immunization, and effectively engaging communities in planning and repair delivery.<sup>2,3</sup> Yet the complexity and global reach of the COVID-19 response with respect to mandatory physical distancing (also referred to as social distancing) and economic impact on households is unprecedented for public health.

Immunization is an important health service which can be suffering from the present COVID-19 pandemic. WHO issues regulation on immunization services during this pandemic? The guidance includes advice on the importance of maintaining safe immunization services. If immunization services are disrupted, it's important to plan for urgent catch-up vaccination of missed children when physical distancing measures are lifted. The guidance further recommends temporary suspension of preventive mass vaccination campaigns and provides advice on conducting careful risk assessment before implementing outbreak response vaccination, attentively to appropriate protective measures to avoid transmission of the COVID-19 virus.