

What COVID-19 Revealed About Us

What is a Pandemic?

A pandemic is a widespread outbreak of an infectious disease that spreads across countries or continents causing increased morbidity and mortality as well as significant economic, social, and political disruption.

Origins of Pandemics

A pandemic happens when a pathogen is introduced into human population from either a domesticated animal or wildlife. Factors that enable the spread of the pathogen within a population include but are not limited to genetic adaptability of the pathogen, its mode of transmission, density of population, susceptibility of infection, patterns of movement or migration, speed and effectiveness of public health surveillance, and response measures. Medical historians can't tell for sure how often pandemics are likely to occur, but they believe the increased pattern of travel and climate change will likely increase their frequency.

COVID-19 vs SARS-CoV-2

COVID-19 is the name of the new disease which is now considered a pandemic. The name is given by World Health Organization (WHO) through the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) to allow health care professionals figure out how the disease can be prevented, transmitted, and treated. On the other hand, SARS-CoV-2 is the name of the virus that causes the disease. The name is given by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) to enable virologists to come up with diagnostic tests, vaccines, and medicines. Coronavirus has been around for some time now, SARS-CoV-2 is just a new kind of it.

If this is confusing, just think of the disease: acquired immune deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and the virus that causes it: human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Common Myths About COVID-19 or SARS-2

- 1- The virus that causes COVID-19 was manufactured deliberately or accidentally in a laboratory.
- 2- Products shipped from overseas, especially China, will make you sick.
- 3- COVID-19 only affects the old and those with pre-existing conditions.
- 4- There's nothing we can do until a vaccine is invented.
- 5- COVID-19 is spread through 5G mobile networks.
- 6- COVID-19 cannot be transmitted in hot and humid climates.
- 7- The world is coming to an end because God is punishing humanity.
- 8- Eating garlic helps prevent infection.
- 9- Blacks, especially "SOSSA" are resistant to COVID-19.

COVID-19 Vaccine

Up to the time of writing this piece, there's no vaccine for COVID-19. Rumors about vaccines being tested in parts of Africa are just not true. Possible vaccines and drug treatments are still under investigations. Existing anti-viral drugs cannot treat SARS-CoV-2 because it's a new virus that mutated from other previously known strains of coronavirus. Chloroquine and its derivative, hydroxychloroquine, are still under clinical trials as a result WHO does not recommend them for the treatment and/or prevention of the disease.

COVID-19 in South Sudan

I'm of the opinion that the number of cases of COVID-19 in South Sudan is close to impossible to determine. The only way to find out how big a problem this pandemic is in any locality is by testing for it. Even here in the United States, some states don't know the number of people infected with the virus because the capacity to conduct widespread testing is not here yet, not to mention South Sudan. The people that get tested are people showing symptoms of the disease. However, we now know that people without symptoms could still harbor and spread the virus.

The promising thing about this scary situation may be that a tuberculosis (TB) vaccine called bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) used some years ago across the world, South Sudan included, is thought to boost the immune system against the new virus. We know South Sudan had many cases of TB, meaning many people could have been exposed to the vaccine. Researchers in Australia and the Netherlands are conducting the studies on it. This does not mean in any way or form that I'm advocating for people to disregard the social distancing and stay home directives announced by the authorities in South Sudan, these measures are effective in places hard hit by the virus so they should be implemented and respected.

Suggested Way Forward for South Sudanese in the United States of America

This brings me to the reason for writing and sharing this piece, CAPACITY BUILDING of our communities. I urge local community organizations and leaders to invest in capacity building of their communities as the only way to lift our members to a better status.

I make this case because unfortunately, COVID-19 has revealed how unprepared refugee communities in the United States are in general and the South Sudanese community in the United States in particular in these difficult times. With the social distancing and stay home directives, The Refugee Group decided it was going to remotely help those affected by the pandemic sign up for government programs they may qualify for, for example, unemployment benefits or Medicaid health insurance. However, it encountered a number of problems.

1. Lack of a computer and Internet access in homes. With social media apps on smart phones, some people seem to have decided that having a computer and Internet access at home was not necessary. I don't think that should be the case. Although it would be possible to sign up for these programs on a smart phone, my experience shows that it's much easier to do the process on a computer, especially if you need to walk someone through the steps by sharing your computer screen.
2. Lack of an email account. Most of these programs require having an email account to sign up for them. In this day and age not having an email account and living in the United States of America is not acceptable, in my opinion. However, this was a sad reality I discovered during this tough time we live in.

3. Lack of knowledge of professional modern communication tools. Like, I mentioned in bullet point number 1, sometimes you may need to share your computer screen with a client you're helping. I think we need to exert more effort and familiarize ourselves with modern communication tools like Microsoft Office Teams and Zoom.

As mentioned earlier, medical historians believe that pandemics are likely to happen more frequently given climate change and increased movement of individuals across the globe. Since we don't know when the next one will be or how severe it's going to be, we need to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Again, CAPACITY BUILDING is the way forward.

Reference:

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