

South Sudan should mask up while waiting for COVID-19 vaccines

In March 2021, it will be one year since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Since that time, COVID-19 has spread around the world and, by 15 February 2021, has affected more than 109 million and led to over 2.4 million deaths in 192 countries, as reported by the [Johns Hopkins University](#).

On 14 February 2021, the cumulative number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in South Sudan is 5,562, according to the Incident Manager at the Ministry of Health. The total number of deaths attributed to COVID-19 is 77. Although lockdowns, travel restrictions, and border closures have helped to control the virus, the three basic strategies of using a face covering, hand washing, and social distancing remain essential prevention methods.

The release of several vaccines in December 2020 has given hope that, at last, the pandemic may be controllable if not outright stopped. The ModernaTX and Pfizer BioNTech vaccines, with efficacy rates of 94.5% and 95% respectively, have shown great promise and have been rolled out in many countries. The Russian-made Sputnik 5 vaccine as well as the upcoming Johnson and Johnson one have also shown great efficacy rates.

It may be months, or even years, before the vaccines will be available in many African countries, South Sudan included. Although these vaccines may be challenging to store in Africa due to their cold storage requirements, many western countries have scrambled to access the vaccines from the manufacturers as they produced them, leaving African countries that can afford the vaccines for their people not getting sufficient quantities. However, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco have acquired some. The Oxford-Astra-Zeneca vaccine may be more practical in Africa because of its favourable storage conditions.

With the second wave and surge in new cases of COVID-19 starting to hit South Sudan, leading to a month-long lockdown, the hope of getting the vaccines seems to fade further and further with yet more delays. The emergence of the virus variants in some countries has dampened any hopes of getting the pandemic under control in the foreseeable future.

While South Sudan awaits the arrival of the vaccines, whenever that will be, the focus should be on the prevention strategies, implemented in tandem with restrictions that should minimally affect daily lives. A mask mandate throughout the country will go a long way in preventing new cases of the virus.

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