



Organização Mundial de Saúde
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In reply please refer to:
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19 August 2020

Honourable Dr Jane Ruth Aceng Ocerro
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
P.O. Box 7272 – Kampala
Uganda

Honourable Minister,

Setting up the Sequencing Laboratory Network for COVID-19 in Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-Cov-2). It is currently the defining global health crisis in all countries in the African Region and globally.

The detection and investigation of COVID-19 remains a challenge in most countries in the WHO African Region due to a lack of adequate testing facilities, lack of supplies and human resources. In addition, the Region has limited laboratory capacity for genetic data for COVID-19 to provide much needed information related to the burden of disease.

Recognizing this, the WHO Regional Office for Africa and Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC) propose to set up a *Regional Sequencing Network for COVID-19 and other emerging pathogens*.

The objective of this network would be to provide the genetic information needed for the swift and effective control of COVID-19 and other emerging pathogens. The network would strengthen laboratory capacity and build core national capacities for implementation of appropriate control measures against COVID19 and other diseases.

Member States would then receive information on the types of COVID-19 strains circulating in Africa, their modes of transmission whether localized or imported from another country within the Region or from another Region.

.../...

Copy for information :

The WHO Representative, Uganda

Encl.: as mentioned

The *Regional Sequencing Network for COVID-19 and other emerging pathogens* will be established with the following objectives:

- To sequence COVID-19 viruses and other emerging pathogens;
- To establish a continental virus sequence repository;
- To prepare and validate test kits for COVID-19;
- To support lab accreditation and quality assurance processes;
- To conduct trainings for laboratory staff;

To start, three Specialized Regional Reference Sequencing Laboratories for COVID-19 and other emerging pathogens specifically are proposed as the regional repository and bioinformatics centres and to assist with preparation and validation of new test kits. These are:

- i) African Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases (ACEGID), Nigeria;
- ii) South African National Bioinformatics Institute (SANBI), South Africa;
- iii) KwaZulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform (KRISP), South Africa.

In addition, eight sequencing laboratories from countries that have full genomics and bioinformation capacities as well as from other laboratories with experience on the sequencing of the emerging pathogens are proposed to be Regional Reference Sequencing Laboratories for COVID-19 and other emerging pathogens.

Namely:

- iv) Institut Pasteur, Dakar, Senegal;
- v) Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR), Ghana;
- vi) The Institut National de la Recherche Biomédicale (INRB), DRC;
- vii) Centre International de Recherches Médicales de Franceville (CIRMF), Gabon;
- viii) Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI), Uganda;
- ix) National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), South Africa;
- x) Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI), Kenya;
- xi) National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Nigeria

Based on previous inter-country collaboration with the polio, influenza, measles and yellow fever laboratory networks, and easy accessibility, countries without sequencing capacity are assigned to respective Specialized Regional Reference sequencing laboratories and Regional Reference sequencing laboratories.

... Kindly refer to Annex 1 for the sequencing laboratories allocation and countries to be supported.

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I therefore request your permission to allow the shipping of the COVID-19 samples to either Specialized Regional Reference sequencing laboratory or the Regional Reference sequencing laboratories. In addition, to allow the sequencing of COVID-19 samples from other countries that do not host a Specialized Regional Reference sequencing laboratory or Regional Reference sequencing laboratory.

The WHO Regional Office for Africa, Africa CDC, and the WHO Country Offices are available to provide support required for the shipping and sequencing of COVID-19 and other emerging pathogens samples.

Once again, please accept our recognition and congratulations for the concerted efforts thus far in responding to COVID-19, and we stand alongside you in continued commitment and dedication.

Please accept, Honourable Minister, the assurance of my highest consideration.



Dr Matshidiso Moeti
Regional Director