

Editorial

COVID-19 – Staying vigilant

The worst of the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be over, as the number of confirmed cases is dropping worldwide and the mortality rates are at its lowest since the pandemic started spreading globally in March 2020. [1] Nevertheless, we need to remain vigilant in our public health approach. Rwanda has achieved the highest vaccination rate in Africa, but it is the exception. [2] Vaccination rates on the continent are low. Risks for new mutations driving new waves of COVID-19 that can reach Rwanda are always possible. One area of concern is human-to-animal-to-human transmission, as the evidence for human to animal transmission is mounting, a process that may hasten viral evolution and novel strain emergence. [3] The WHO restates that “striving to vaccinate 70% of the population of every country remains essential for bringing the pandemic under control, with priority given to health workers, older people and other at-risk groups”. [4]

At the same time, worldwide, people are getting emotionally exhausted after more than two years of school closures, quarantines, curfews, mask wearing and other protective measures. [5] This is understandable, but the virus itself does not care. Rather, it benefits from people who become less compliant with regard to gatherings, mask wearing and other protective measures. Even in Rwanda, where guidelines have been clearly communicated and well observed, you can find that some people are becoming more relaxed as regards mask wearing and other pandemic control measures. This is understandable and it is not necessarily a reason for concern as this development brings positives as well. Given the good vaccination rates, the risks for a potent new wave in Rwanda have indeed significantly reduced. A relaxation of pandemic control measures is therefore possible and will reduce harmful secondary effects, including teenage pregnancy, depression and anxiety sometimes leading to suicide attempts. [6,7]

In conclusion, from a public health perspective it is important to stay vigilant and continue to monitor the situation very closely. But at the same time, because of the high vaccination rates in Rwanda, it was timely therefore that some relaxation of the rules was effected, as the secondary negative effects of the pandemic are also a matter of public health concern.

References

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