

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC)

Safe Vaccination Administration in the Context of COVID-19 in Africa



Context

Immunizations are an essential health service that protect susceptible individuals from vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD).¹ While committing to sustaining immunization systems, countries should use approaches that respect the principle of do-no-harm and prevent transmission of COVID-19, while providing immunization services. Immunization visits can be used as opportunities to disseminate public health messages that encourage behaviours that reduce transmission risk of COVID-19, identify signs and symptoms of COVID-19 disease and provide guidance on what to do if symptoms emerge.

Risk dimension

Healthcare workers/vaccinators and vaccine recipients may be at risk of exposure to COVID-19, but adherence to infection prevention and control (IPC) measures can reduce the risk of transmission. Administrative controls, including universal screening and triage, and environmental controls, including use of outdoor spaces, should be implemented as outlined in the guidance for primary health centers issued by Africa CDC. If vaccines are to be administered indoors, windows should be open to increase airflow. Use of appropriate personal protective equipment by all healthcare workers and [universal use of cloth masks](#) by vaccine recipients, their mothers, or accompanying adults, can also reduce the risk of transmission.



Protecting healthcare workers and patients from infection

This involves administrative controls, environmental controls and personal protective equipment.



Administrative controls

- Immunization activities should be undertaken only if aligned with WHO IPC guidance on minimizing COVID-19 transmission.²
- Modify session locations to ensure separation of immunization services from treatment areas, and proactively inform communities about this strategy while reinforcing the importance of vaccination.³
- Establish a screening process before allowing entry to the vaccination area.²
- Ensure that vaccinators are trained on the basics of infection prevention.² Adhere rigorously to good IPC practices to protect health workers against COVID-19 and other pathogens transmitted person-to-person or via needlestick injuries, as per WHO recommendations.²
- To limit transmission of COVID-19 while providing immunizations to children under age 2, WHO recommends that only one person accompany the child to be vaccinated.
- Ensure that policies and resources are available to adequately supply personal protective equipment and hand hygiene supplies for vaccinators.
- Children less than 5 years of age do not require masks.⁴ To minimize the small risk that an infant or young child might transmit the virus, they should be faced towards the mother or accompanying adult as the injection is being administered. For infants, breast feeding may continue throughout if the mother is breast feeding.
- If oral polio vaccine (OPV) is being administered, the child's mother or accompanying adult can be given the vial and he/she can administer the required drops with supervision.²
- For children too large to remain on an accompanying adult's lap, the child's face should be turned towards the accompanying adult as the injection is administered.
- Ensure signs are placed in strategic places to direct patient flow and remind them about mask wearing, physical distancing, and hand hygiene.

¹World Health Organization & United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Immunization in the context of COVID-19 pandemic: frequently asked questions (FAQ), 16 April 2020. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020. Available from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331818>.

²World Health Organization. Framework for decision making: Implementation of mass vaccination campaigns in the context of COVID-19. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020.

³World Health Organization. Maintaining essential health services: Operational guidance for the COVID-19 context: Interim guidance 1 June 2020. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020.

⁴World Health Organization. Mask use in the context of COVID-19: Interim guidance 1 December 2020. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020.

Environmental controls

- Where possible, vaccines should be administered outdoors. If this is not possible, a room with ample ventilation—open windows and doors—should be used.
- As for all activities in primary health centers (PHC) or other institutions, crowding should be avoided. Waiting patients should queue allowing 2 metres of space between persons. If 2 metres is not feasible due to space constraints, a minimum of 1 metre should be maintained. Mark at least a 1 metre gap on the floor with chalk/markers/tape to encourage safe distancing.
- Ensure adequate access to IPC supplies (e.g. masks, alcohol-based hand rub or hand washing stations with soap and water).²



Personal protective equipment

Africa CDC has developed updated COVID-19 guidance, Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Different Clinical Settings and Activities. The risk of transmission of virus from asymptomatic persons is high, and ALL adults including HCWs and those who bring children to be vaccinated, should wear masks.

Personal protective equipment for healthcare workers

Healthcare worker/personnel	Activity	PPE Recommendation
Healthcare workers, community health care workers	Preliminary screening not involving direct contact (triage) prior to vaccine administration	Medical mask Eye protection ¹
Healthcare workers	Direct contact when administering vaccines	Medical mask Eye protection Hand hygiene ²
Crowd managers	Outdoor crowd management	Medical mask (if indoors, eye protection should also be used)

Measures to reduce risk of transmission for persons receiving vaccinations

Individual	Recommendation
Parent/guardian accompanying child	Cloth face mask/medical mask*
Children at the age at which a country recommends mask-wearing and adolescents	Cloth face mask/medical mask*
Children under 5 years of age	PPE is not required; however, they should be faced towards the mother/parent/guardian as the vaccine is administered.
Adults receiving vaccinations	Cloth face mask/medical mask*

*If the vaccine recipient and parent/guardian accompanying a child do not have their own masks, the health care facility should provide medical masks.

JANUARY 2021

(Footnotes)

¹The use of eye protection is recommended when it is difficult to maintain adequate physical distance (1–2 meters) or set up physical barriers for triage point.

²Perform hand hygiene after each recipient with soap and water or hand sanitizer containing 60%–80% alcohol. Use gloves (nonsterile) only if there is risk of direct contact with blood and body fluids, nonintact skin is anticipated (e.g., rash, lesion, cut), as indicated by risk assessment conducted before every interaction with recipients. If gloves are used, the vaccinator must change them between each recipient, dispose of them in a bin with a lid, and perform hand hygiene.



Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), African Union Commission
Roosevelt Street W21 K19, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia