

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

Statement on Herbal Remedies and Medicines for Prevention and Treatment of COVID-19



This statement aims to provide guidance and recommendation to African Union Member States in responding to the following questions:



1. What should countries do when announcing identification of a herbal remedy or medicine?
2. What are the implications for the rest of the continent?

INTRODUCTION

Herbal-based traditional medicines or phytomedicines play a significant role in disease management in Africa and are widely used as alternative medicines. Therefore, it is important to evaluate both the safety and efficacy of these indigenous botanical assets in medicine prior to endorsing their use by the medical community and the public.

There have been several declarations by institutions in Member States on the use of herbal-based traditional medicine for the prevention of SARS-CoV-2 transmission or treating people with a presumptive or definitive diagnosis of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Many of the claims are difficult to verify because of the lack of documented evidence showing that these remedies prevent or clear SARS-CoV-2 infection and/or improve clinical outcomes of those suffering from COVID-19.

As the pandemic continues to spread in Africa, there are increasing messages promoting the use of herbal-based traditional medicines for COVID-19. Currently, no herbal remedy has been validated for use to prevent or treat COVID-19. *Herbal* remedies or medicines are naturally occurring, plant-derived substances that are developed mostly through a process with minimal or no respect for good clinical practice (GCP).

Resources

1. World Health Organization (WHO) / African Vaccines Regulatory Forum (AVAREF): <https://www.afro.who.int/news/african-regulatory-agencies-ethics-committees-expedite-covid-19-clinical-trial-reviews>
2. WHO position on traditional medicine: https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-supports-scientific-proven-traditional-medicine?gclid=Cj0KCQjw2PP1BRCiARIsAEqv-pSn9gBtSXrT10kzxKzEsBazyxwaHbzApr4mfmxOaYJgMKExmBSjW4QaAl0GEALw_wcB
3. AUDA-NEPAD AMRH: <https://www.nepad.org/publication/report-africa-medical-devices-forum-covid-19-task-force-24-april-2020>
4. Operational guidance: Information needed to support clinical trials of herbal products. TDR/GEN/Guidance/05.1. Copyright © World Health Organization on behalf of the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, 2005
5. WHO guidelines on safety monitoring of herbal medicines in pharmacovigilance systems. World Health Organisation (2004)
6. Medicines assessment during public health emergencies needs good science, best practices and proper communication: Statement of Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) International Expert Working Group: https://cioms.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CIOMS_WGXII_Statement.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) recommends that Member States should do the following when herbal remedies or medicines are proclaimed or developed in their countries:



1. **Designate departments to monitor and evaluate the research procedures** in the production and use of these remedies, ensuring compliance with the national ethics and regulatory laws.



2. **Create a herbal remedies registry** including information about their inventors.



3. **Support the conduct of GCP and good participatory practice guidelines (GPPC)** – compliant research to validate the safety and efficacy of the herbal-based traditional medicines.



4. **Ensure respect for intellectual property and human rights.**



5. **Harmonize local norms and standards** for medicinal plant research and promote transparent discussion and collaboration between all stakeholders, researchers and herbalists working in the same field in-country and within the continent.



6. **Promote capacity-building** for scientists, herbalists and their institutions to conduct research on herbal remedies.



7. **Mobilize funds and technical support** for research and development of medicines from proclaimed herbal remedies or medicines.