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WHO IS SUPPORTING THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA IN IMPROVING COVID-19 VACCINATION COVERAGE THROUGH STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND DOCUMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICES

Liberia is one of the countries in the African continent that has a successful history of introducing new vaccines. However, the initial deployment of COVID-19 vaccines had its shortfalls as experienced by many countries globally.

Liberia received a total of 3,859,560, doses of the COVID-19 vaccine out of which 2,107,800 doses were delivered through the COVAX facility. As of July 2022, a total of 2.4 million persons were fully vaccinated representing 54 percent against WHO's target of 70 percent by July 2022. Vaccination coverage among other populations of importance include 15,894 health workers with a total of 99 percent of the targeted population and 8,916 refugees

HIGHLIGHTS

- How is WHO supporting the government of Liberia in improving COVID-19 vaccination coverage and documenting the strategies, best practices, lessons learned and challenges ?
- Liberia conducts its first-ever Emergency Care Systems Assessment (ECSA) to strengthen preparedness and response to public health emergencies
- WHO Liberia Operationalizes PRSEAH by demonstrating a continuous commitment to zero tolerance toward sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
- WHO Liberia Walks The Talk, conquering the 4.2km target
- Liberia sets to drive up routine immunization-officially launched the African Vaccination Week 24 - 30 April 2022

WHO supports the government of Liberia in preparing and responding to 3 disease outbreaks (COVID-19, Lassa fever and Measles).



Coordination has been pivotal to achieving progress in Liberia. Coordination with local and international partners in mobilizing resources, planning, and implementation has been closely orchestrated through the regular Incident Management System (IMS) meetings and helped monitoring progress, identifying opportunities, and overcome challenges. An effective Immunization Supply Chain ensured the distribution of vaccines to the last mile, thereby preventing stock-outs along different levels of the supply chain.

At the beginning of 2022 and following the approval of Pfizer vaccine for children 12 -17, vaccination was extended to this age group with focus on schools. It was a gradual process and initially concentrated in Montserrado county.

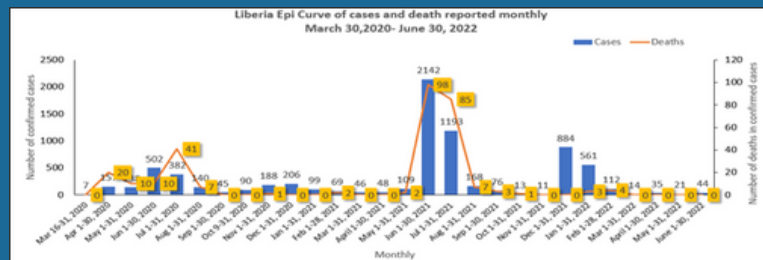
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Response to COVID-19

A total of 100 COVID-19 cases were confirmed from testing 3,588 samples in the second quarter compared to 687 confirmed from testing 4,079 samples in the first quarter. Cumulatively, a total of seven thousand and five hundred (7,500) confirmed cases, including two hundred and ninety-four (294) death (CFR=3.7%) and 404 health worker infections with 7,166 patients recovered from March 16, 2020 to June 30, 2022.



Response to Measles outbreak

Following the completion of a risk assessment to respond to the measles outbreak in Liberia, WHO supported the government in preparedness and response across the country. The first phase of a nationwide campaign was conducted from April to May 2022 targeting 260,000 children.

3,455 measles cases were confirmed and managed with a case fatality rate of 1.3% (47/3,455) from 1 April to 30 June 2022.

Cumulatively from January to 30 June 2022, a total of 4,537 suspected cases of measles were reported in 14 counties of which 300 were classified as not a case, and the 4,237 cases were classified as: Laboratory confirmed- 7.1% (301/4,237), Clinically confirmed - 11.4% (484/4,237) and Epi linked -81.5% (3,452/4,237). A second phase of the campaign has been planned for July 2022.

Enhancing surveillance using One health monitoring tool

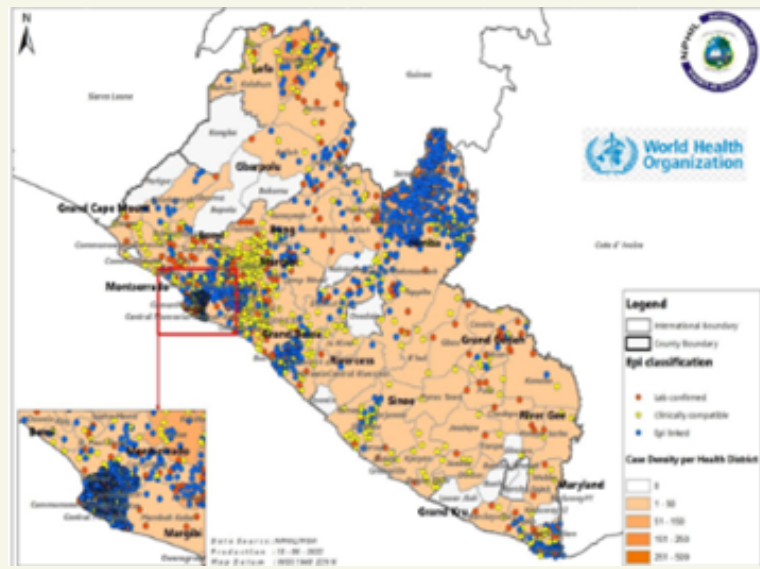
WHO supported and led the development of one health monitoring and evaluation tools and one health laboratory guideline. These activities brought together 70 participants of the multi-sectoral team who were part of the development and validation of these tools. The one health monitoring tool is now in use as the standard tool for monitoring surveillance activities across sectors while the laboratory guideline will serve as guidance to improve outbreak investigation.

BEST PRACTICES

<p>Strong political leadership from all branches of government</p>	<p>Working directly with school authorities to provide education on the Pfizer vaccine increasing the 12-17 years old vaccine uptake</p>
<p>Community ownership and taking the vaccines to the communities</p>	<p>Community centred planning</p>
<p>Performance-based vaccination and timely provision of technical, operational, logistical, and financial assistance was a game-changer.</p>	<p>Follow-up calls to community members scheduled for 2nd dose</p>
<p>Onsite (mobile) provision of vaccination codes and printing of certificates as proof of vaccination</p>	<p>Regular use of data during planning and implementation key in resource deployment.</p>

Laboratory and diagnostic service strengthening

As part of efforts to strengthen the Country's capacity for COVID-19 genomic sequencing, WHO supported the training of staff, and procurement of a sequencing machine and supplies. WHO filled critical gaps and improved COVID-19 testing at NRL through the donation of assorted lab supplies including 1,500 PCR tests of Taqpath reagents, 1,500 pieces of VTM & swabs, 10,000 pieces of examination gloves, and 1,000 pieces of centrifuge tubes to the National Reference Laboratory. These supplies contributed to the testing of 3,588 samples with 100 samples confirmed in the second quarter of 2022.



Liberia conducts its first ever Emergency Care Systems Assessment (ECSA) to strengthen preparedness and response for public health emergencies

Despite previous experience with Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) and other outbreaks, the increasing demands and needs brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical gaps and challenges faced by the Emergency Care System (ECS).

Liberia's ECS is evolving, having begun to incorporate pre-hospital services as a vital component of health care service delivery and inclusion of dedicated emergency units within some health facilities. The pandemic exposed the urgent need to re-organize, re-orientate and strengthen ECS to be ready to prevent and manage regular emergencies, outbreaks and pandemic situations. Emergency care is a top priority in Liberia, as it aims to significantly improve both pre-hospital and facility-based care systems.

Emergency Care Systems address a wide range of common medical, surgical, and obstetric conditions, including injury, complications of pregnancy, exacerbations of non-communicable diseases (e.g., asthma, heart attacks, strokes), and acute infections (e.g., sepsis, acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea) as well as in case of outbreaks of communicable diseases and other public health emergencies.

It has the potential to address half of the deaths and more than a third of disabilities in low- and middle-income countries. Robust emergency care systems are essential to prepare for extraordinary complex mass emergencies and preventing collapse of the health system in the face of a stressor, thereby preventing secondary mortality.

In order to come up with a strategy to strengthen ECS, the MOH, with technical support from the three levels of WHO (country office, AFRO and HQ) and the African Federation for Emergency Medicine (AFEM) and other partners, undertook a national system-level assessment from 2 - 6 May 2022 using the WHO Emergency Care System Assessment (ECSA) tool.

The process involved multisectoral stakeholders at national and sub-national levels including MOH, other line Ministries, other Government Institutions, UN agencies, donors, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, the private sector and academia. The assessment covered all the five main domains of ECS i.e. System organization, governance and financing, data and quality improvement, Scene care, transfer and transport, Facility-based care and Emergency Preparedness, resulting in the identification of critical gaps that guided and informed the development of ECS Priority Actions for Liberia.



The next steps (short and medium terms) will include establishing multi-sectoral stakeholders to coordinate resource mobilization and implementation of the priority actions at all levels.

WHO LIBERIA WALKS THE TALK, CONQUERING THE 4.2KM TARGET



The WHO Liberia Country Office on May 20th, 2022, joined the rest of the world in the Walk the Talk: Health For All challenge- covering 4.2kms as their team target. The country office took on the challenge ahead of the 75th World Health Assembly, which started on May 22nd, 2022. Led by two coaches from the UN gym in Monrovia, the team members started with a 10-minute warm-up exercise before engaging in the walk around the One UN building. After an hour and 3 minutes, the team reached their 4.2km target at a pace of 15 minutes per km, which closed with a cool-down aerobic exercise for another 10 minutes.

"I am so excited to have been part of this event. I feel energized and revived. Exercises are key to good health," said Mr. Tamba a WHO Liberia staff member.

"It felt good taking time away as a team from our busy schedules and just focusing on reviving our energies through a fitness exercise- we will be having more of these events which will be scaled up for broader participation beyond the Country Office," said Dr. Musu Duworko, Team lead, ai, for the program of the Communicable and Non-Communicable disease at the Country Office.

The staff members joined the challenge as a group through a dedicated tracking application called "Walk The Talk," created by WHO global, making it simple for people all over the world to walk, run, and jog for health as they take part in the Health for All Challenge. The application allows participants to select their distance targets between 3 and 4.2km, it also permits taking photos and videos while participating in the Walk the Talk event.

The Walk the Talk exercise highlights the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. Non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and chronic kidney diseases, among others, are a reminder for Liberia and the rest of the world to focus on cost-effective preventive measures, which include maintaining healthy lifestyles and regular physical exercise.

The 3rd edition of the Walk the Talk: The Health for All Challenge was held in Geneva on 22 May. Regional and Country offices were encouraged to take part in the activity. This Walk the Talk event was an important landmark, as it's the first since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was supported by the Sport and Health project being run jointly with Qatar in conjunction with the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

WHO LIBERIA OPERATIONALIZES PRSEAH BY DEMONSTRATING A CONTINUOUS COMMITMENT TO ZERO TOLERANCE TOWARD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ABUSE AND HARASSMENT



The WHO's dedication in safeguarding the most vulnerable people is gravely compromised by sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of the communities we serve. In comparison, sexual harassment (SH) at work is a serious violation of our duty of care and trust.

Demonstrating continued commitment to the cause the WHO Liberia CO held its second #PRSEAH session during the second quarter in an all-staff meeting - led by the PRSEAH CO focal point, Dr Musu Duworko, who among other things, took the team through the distinctions between Sexual Harassment, Sexual Abuse, and Sexual Exploitation while elaborating on who are the concerned parties in the stated categories.

The staff members were taken through group work on case studies to debate into which cadres the presented scenarios fell. The session was very interactive and generated healthy debate, which saw staff bring up different contexts that related to the scenarios presented. Staff were also provided with IEC materials such as brochures and armbands to serve as reminders of their commitment to the cause.



Liberia sets to drive up routine immunization- officially launched the African Vaccination Week 24 - 30 April, 2022



The surge of COVID-19 has negatively affected routine vaccination services globally, and Liberia is not an exception. This does pose a threat to the hard-earned gains the country has made over the years, in the management of vaccine-preventable diseases. African Vaccination Week is commemorated on the 24th-30th of April every year along with World Immunisation week, providing an opportunity to reflect on the importance of vaccines and how they benefit the population at large, regardless of age, from almost 25 vaccine-preventable diseases. Liberia is one country that has thrived from the protection that vaccines provide, which doesn't only benefit the health of individuals and families but also translates into the health and well-being of the population, which are integral to the development and economic productivity.

On 27th April 2022, Liberia launched the African Vaccination Week as part of the commemoration under the theme "Long Life for All". This intervention came at a time when the country has seen a rise in the number of cases of other vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles.

Speaking during the launch, the Chief Executive Officer of JFK Medical Centre, Dr. Jerry Brown, stressed the importance of teamwork in the delivery process, as part of making the Immunisation Programme a success.

"It's all dependent on teamwork from the vaccine message developers to the providers, and finally the recipients. We are all critical players in the process. As such, in order for Liberia to succeed, we must do it and do it well", he said.

He further urged all parents and caregivers to be sincere in ensuring the provision of optimal care to children under their care by making sure they are fully vaccinated and protected. He also urged the older population to get the required vaccines, including the vaccines for COVID-19.

WHO Family and Reproductive Health cluster lead Dr. Musu Duworko, read the Africa Regional Directors' message at the event. Some of the key points in the message are the need for countries to ramp up routine immunization and accelerate COVID-19 vaccination efforts concurrently, by allocating the necessary resources. Emphasis is also made on the benefits of maintaining routine immunization services, which are more cost-effective and will lead to a longer life for all.

The Ministry of Health with support from WHO conducted an outreach vaccination exercise across all 15 counties during the week-long campaign with a target of vaccinating at least 2 million people during the period. WHO, together with UNICEF in Liberia, with support from GAVI and USAID, are cordially working together to support community vaccination outreach during the African Vaccination Week. At the end of the campaign week, most children who missed out on scheduled immunization were reached during this exercise.



FOLLOW US IN THE NEXT ISSUE (III):

- Measles Outbreak Response
- Liberia completes comprehensive EPI review
- Liberia completes its first maternal newborn quality of care assessment, targeting major county hospitals
- Liberia completes its National STEPS Survey with support from WHO
- Launching of Health Reporters Network for Liberia
- WHO Liberia completes its Country Cooperation Strategy (2022-2026)



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