

20 June 2020 – Almost 6 months into our response to COVID-19, we continue to learn many things about this new disease. With millions of cases now reported, we have a wide body of research to draw from—which is both a blessing and a challenge. Sifting through case studies, evaluating data, and revising earlier recommendations is part of that challenge.

Scientists, researchers, health workers, and others are working together to better understand the virus; how it spreads, and how we can protect ourselves, our loved ones, and others. Every day, we test, trial, discover and understand new things. As our understanding develops, WHO's advice to governments and communities evolves.

Just this week alone, ongoing research has led to 2 key developments: WHO announced that the hydroxychloroquine arm of the Solidarity Trial was being stopped, based on evidence that it does not result in the reduction of mortality of hospitalised COVID-19 patients. At the same time, initial clinical trial results from the United Kingdom show that dexamethasone, a corticosteroid, can be lifesaving for patients who are critically ill with COVID-19, including patients on ventilators.

In addition to evaluating data on clinical trials and research and development, we must also adapt to new realities related to community transmission dynamics; how lockdowns and other public health measures impact people's lives and livelihoods; the availability of medical supplies; and the challenges faced by health systems.

Not all countries have been able to report their data systematically to WHO, which makes it harder to obtain a clear picture of the transmission dynamics and severity of the disease in our Region. Many countries are in fact struggling to identify and document the deaths that are occurring due to COVID-19. Differences in reporting methods and testing strategies affect the information we receive and can affect the recommendations that WHO makes.

All of these factors impact the advice WHO gives.

That's why WHO's guidance on issues like masks and medicines has been refined over the past months. As the situation changes, what applied in the beginning of the crisis may not apply

now. And as research progresses, our understanding on transmission, detection, treatment and other aspects of the virus evolves, guiding our recommendations to countries.

COVID-19 is a new disease. Many things are still unknown. As our knowledge evolves, our strategies and some of our disease control measures evolve with it.

In our analysis and our recommendations, we also have to consider issues beyond the health sector, including the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

In summary, this is a new disease; it has its own unique features; our research and understanding are evolving over time; and our recommendations about how best to control the pandemic are also evolving. WHO is working with our partners to establish the best scientific evidence base on which to advise governments, health professionals and the public on the most effective ways to prevent, diagnose, treat, and recover from COVID-19.

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