

Gender. The findings reveal that more men are getting sick compared to women.

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A joint team of Ugandan scientists have released novel findings of an in-depth study on selected 56 Covid-19 patients.

The findings released in Kampala yesterday found that the recovered Covid-19 patients were given hydroxychloroquine, vitamin C and antibiotics, touted within government circles as the available potential treatment for Covid-19.

The Ugandan team of scientists focused on the progress the 56 Covid-19 patients made during the period under review.

More than 30 scientists from Makerere University, the Aids Support Organisation, doctors from UPDF; selected hospitals and foreign universities monitored the patients for one month- from admission to the various government hospitals until discharge time.

The objective was to boost evidence-based response in the fight against a pandemic that has so far killed more than 340,000 people with more than 5.6 million confirmed cases in 213 countries and territories around the world.

But in part, the new scientific study led by Dr Bruce Kirenga, the director of Makerere University Lung Institute, sought to help the government unravel reasons behind Uganda's zero Covid-19-related deaths to date.

The findings

The researchers found that the age bracket of Covid-19 cases, varying level of underlying health complications, type of treatment given to patients and level of exposure to the virus are explanatory to recovery and zero death in the country.

"The average age of the patients diagnosed in Uganda was 33 years, which is far lower than has been reported elsewhere in Asia and North America," the report of a study done between March to mid April, reads.

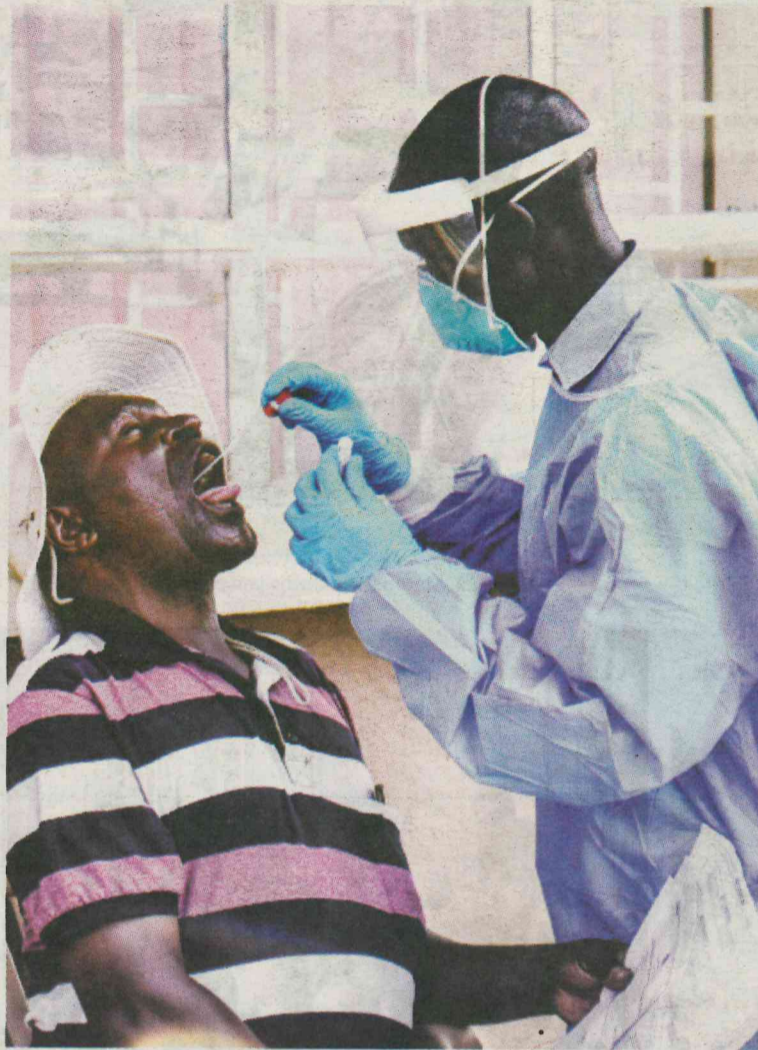
They established that the younger people tend to overcome Covid-19 because of strong immunity and fewer health complications associated with the age group, compared to the elderly.

In Wuhan, China, the first epicenter of the deadly virus, the average age estimate for patients is 59 years, while in New York, USA, it is as high as 63 years.

In the report, two patients, however, transitioned to severe level and one was put on oxygen in an emergency support to aid breathing.

Dr Kirenga said one of the two patients had hypertension, diabetes and asthma. The other patient was

Uganda releases new findings on Covid-19



Testing. A medical official collects samples for Covid-19 testing from a truck driver at Vurra border point in Arua District early this month. MONITOR PHOTO

overweight. He said the two patients were aged 40 and 50 years.

According to the study, at least 25 per cent of the 56 patients had other underlying health complications beside Covid-19.

"Most of the conditions were the non-communicable diseases. Hypertension and diabetes accounted for 11 per cent. Up to 28 per cent of the patients had raised blood pressure above 140/90mmHg," the report further reads. Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80.

The researchers assessed extent of damage to lungs, heart, liver and effects on blood level.

In the report, up to 43 per cent of patients had evidence of general tissue damage.

"We found that 11 per cent of the patients had low blood cells, 12 per cent had evidence of liver damage,

while the kidneys had no evidence of damage," the report further reveals.

Gender analysis

Men dominated in total number of

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers asked government to increase testing for Covid-19 instead of relying on temperature guns as patients are not showing symptoms.

"Add rhinorrhoea [running nose] to symptoms for cases screening," the researchers say.

They also say government should increase clinical and imaging tests to support proper grading of severity of the disease.

cases, contributing up to 68 per cent of the total cases.

Dr Kirenga said males are more likely to be exposed than females because they are more outgoing and blend so much with public and dominate in workplaces.

Symptoms exhibited

Most common symptoms the patients presented with included fever (21 per cent), cough (20 per cent), runny nose (16 per cent), headache (13 per cent), muscle aches and fatigue at seven per cent.

"However, more than half of the diagnosed Covid-19 patients didn't have any of these symptoms at diagnosis," the researchers wrote.

The finding that patients had no symptoms, however, deviate from what has been reported in other countries, where up to 80 per cent of hospitalised patients have been found to have symptoms.

"The fact that most of the patients do not have symptoms calls for rigorous case finding and contact tracing strategies," the researchers highlighted.

Use of hydroxychloroquine

Hydroxychloroquine, vitamin C and antibiotics were the major treatment given to alleviate the symptoms in the patients, according to the research.

Not all patients who recovered were given hydroxychloroquine, according to the researchers.

Patients who received hydroxychloroquine recovered faster than those who did not.

"The patients were able to recover under supportive care through managing symptoms, treatment with antibiotics for those who had evidence of bacterial infection, hydroxychloroquine and vitamin C," the researchers wrote.

The researchers also asked government to increase capacity to diagnose other non-communicable disease that are the major comorbidities of coronavirus.

"Research should be supported, including biomedical science research. This will allow growth of locally-generated evidence to support the country's Covid-19 response," the report further reads.

MPS approve more Shs33.3b for roads, research

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PARLIAMENT. Barely two months after Parliament passed a Shs932b supplementary budget, another Shs33.3b was yesterday provided for the government by three ministries before the end of Financial Year 2019/20.

In the supplementary budget, MPs approved recommendations of the Budget Committee chaired by Ntengeru North MP Amos Lugolobi to provide for Shs10b to finance the maintenance of roads under Kampala Capital City Authority. The roads on which the money will be spent are Upper Kololo Terrence, Queensway, Wilson, Sikh, Channel Street, Johnson, Lubiri Ring, Sir Apollo Kagwa, among others.

Shs10b for UIRI

Also provided is Shs10b to the Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI) for purchase of machinery to run the training institute in Namanve. The UIRI facility, which was commissioned by President Museveni last year, was established by the government to enhance industrial skills by providing platforms for hands-on training and apprenticeship, engage in modern methods of machining and manufacturing of metallic parts, accessories and implements; and creating capacity for development of indigenous technologies and reduce technology import bill.

Responding to questions raised by MPs during time of debate of the supplementary expenditure on why the Shs10b for UIRI cannot wait for the new financial year, Mr Lugolobi said there was need for money to make the facility operational.

"We have not had that facility before. It is a facility that manufactures machinery but it does not have cash to become operational," Mr Lugolobi said.

Parliament also approved Shs9b for upgrading of health centre IIs to health centre III status, and construction of Seed secondary schools in some parts of the country under the Ministry of Local Government. The same ministry also got Shs776m additional funding.

The Ministry of Finance received Shs1.09b for payment of five-months salary for staff of the privatisation unit, which were never captured in the 2019/2020 Budget.

Last supplementary

In the last supplementary budget, key appropriations included Shs284b Covid-19 fighting cash that went to different government Ministries, departments and Agencies deemed to be on the frontline of fighting the pandemic; and Shs400b for defence classified expenditure.

It is out of the same supplementary that Parliament allocated itself Shs10b which was distributed to MPs, with each legislator getting Shs20m to ostensibly help fight Covid-19.

Meanwhile, the committee could not proceed with the scrutiny of the Shs1.9b that government wanted to reportedly clear electricity bills for Fine Spinners and Ntyil, both privately-run manufacturing companies.

According to the committee reports, this request was withdrawn by government.

BY NOBERT ATUKUNDA
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KAMPALA. Following government's move to distribute face masks to Ugandans, the Ministry of Health has said it has earmarked Shs35b to procure facemasks for at least 33 million Ugandans.

The ministry said government plans to distribute the masks to all Ugandans aged six years and above before Thursday next week when

Govt earmarks Shs35b for facemasks

public transport is expected to resume.

During his 15th address to the nation in relation to coronavirus on Monday last week, President Museveni said government had decided to provide Ugandans aged six and above with free facemasks, which they must wear all times

while in public.

The President said public transport, among others restricted businesses, would only resume after all Ugandans got the government masks.

Last week, government said it did not have a budget to buy masks to be distributed to Ugandans

free of charge as directed by the President.

"That is a budget that we did put in our request to Parliament, so it requires a different budget and it will be proper if we put it as a supplementary," Health minister Jane Ruth Aceng told Parliament on Wednesday last week.