



DANGER TO PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

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The time when the world is dealing with corona disaster, there is this fear that we might not forget about other communicable diseases. There are multiple international and national programs in place to prevent these communicable diseases. The fear is these programs might not get the attention it deserves at the time when all the attention is toward Covid-19. Currently more than 180 countries/regions have reported Covid-19 cases.¹

The highly contagious measles cases have continued to increase. World Health Organization (WHO) data shows that globally measles cases rose by 300 percent in the first three months of 2019, compared to the same time period of 2018. The WHO African region has recorded a 700% increase, the Region of the Americas 60%, the European region 300%, the Eastern Mediterranean 100%, with 40% increases in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific. According to statistics, it caused approximately 110,000 deaths worldwide in 2017.^{2,3} The point of concern is that even countries with high overall vaccination coverage like USA and Israel noted spikes in cases. United States recorded 1,282 individual cases of measles, greatest number since 1992.⁴ Speaking about polio, countries are still struggling with its eradication. Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan are still endemic recording total of 29, 18 and 146 cases respectively in 2019.⁵ These are the countries currently dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic

too. As of March 15, 2020, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan reported 13 new circulating vaccine derived poliovirus (cVDP2) cases, the largest number of cases the province has ever seen in a day.⁶ According to WHO, Lower respiratory tract infections remained the deadliest communicable disease, causing 3.0 million deaths globally in 2016. Diarrheal diseases caused 1.4 million deaths in 2016. Similarly, Tuberculosis (TB) was responsible for 1.3 million deaths globally. Lower respiratory tract infections, diarrheal diseases and tuberculosis are among the top ten global causes of deaths.

The situation at hand demands extra measures on the part of authorities and public health experts. With the Covid-19 pandemic, trend has been observed where there is diversion of all human and budgetary resources toward Covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic and helplessness of many nations to deal with it alarms us that we are not capable of dealing with another pandemic at this time. Therefore, it is important that all those programs i.e. immunization programs, TB, HIV, Hepatitis control programs etc. must continue at the same time. Otherwise, more deaths might result associated with these communicable diseases than the overall endeavor would save from Covid-19.

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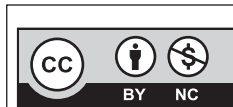
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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declared no conflict of interest

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NIL



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