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INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS AND FUNDING NEEDED AS COVID-19 THREATENS TO CAUSE A RESURGENCE OF HIV, TB AND MALARIA

According to an [article](#) published in the [Nature Research Journal](#) on 12 August 2020, countries need to mobilize additional funding for the three diseases (HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria), and raise public awareness of the rising threat of COVID-19 to their treatment programs if they wish to prevent a resurgence of the diseases due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers also need to apply real-world data to refine models that predict the impact of the pandemic on the three diseases. These revised models will provide a more accurate forecast of the effects and alert the world to the potential catastrophe.

Undoubtedly, COVID-19 threatens to undo the advances made so far in the fight against the three diseases. Some of the measures countries have put in place to control the spread of COVID-19, particularly the lockdowns, have prevented many people from accessing testing and treatment services. The health sector has also prioritized COVID-19 at the expense of other diseases. Modeling studies have painted a grim picture. For instance, [one model](#) predicts an additional 200 000 TB-related deaths across China, India, and South Africa between 2020 and 2024. The article raised concerns that the outcome may even be worse than predicted.

Four proposals for preventing a resurgence of the three diseases

The article proposes four ways of preventing a resurgence of HIV, TB, and malaria in order to protect the gains made in the fight against the three diseases. Firstly, the article highlights the importance of raising the awareness of the impact of COVID-19 on the three diseases. It urges hospitals and health authorities

in affected cities and regions to remain aware of the increasing numbers of HIV, TB, and malaria cases and deaths.

Secondly, the article proposes that researchers apply real-world data to update their models. Since most of the models were designed as the pandemic was gaining traction in March 2020, revising the models to include updated data is likely to increase the precision of the estimates. For instance, the [modeling study](#) mentioned above estimated 200 000 deaths in the three countries (China, India, and South Africa), but this number could range from 123 523 to 301 553 deaths. Another modeling study predicted that [malaria cases in 2020 could increase by 206 million](#), although this increase could be as low as 157 million or as high as 254 million. Similarly, it is estimated that malaria deaths could increase by 379 000, or vary between 221 000 and 537 000.

The article also encourages public, private, and non-governmental organizations to raise public awareness of the rising levels of infectious diseases. It notes that these public-information campaigns will help, in part, to reassure existing patients, as well as those who become unwell, that they need to seek—or continue—treatment.

Lastly, the article calls for increased funding to address the increased demand for tests, treatment, and research caused by the resurgence of infectious diseases. The Global Fund has estimated that countries would need an additional \$28.5 billion, for the next 12 months, to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the three disease programs and to respond to COVID-19. The Global Fund has already made \$1 billion available to recipient countries and expects to raise an additional \$5 billion.

However, the article notes that international donors, such as the United Kingdom, are prioritizing COVID-19 research and development, and cutting back on science-aid funding. For instance, the United States' most recent [COVID-19 supplemental bill](#) allocated \$4.4 billion to the global response, mostly for research and development. The bill did not allocate any funding to the Global Fund despite calls by advocates to allocate the partnership at least \$4 billion towards the COVID-19 response.

Further reading:

- Nature, [How to stop COVID-19 fuelling a resurgence of AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis](#), 12 August 2020

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