



**World Health  
Organization**

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REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

## Second Coordinating Meeting of WHO Collaborating Centres on TB, HIV, Viral Hepatitis and STI

Virtual meeting, 7 May 2020

## Abstract

Second coordinating meeting of the WHO collaborating centres on TB, HIV, viral hepatitis and STI was held on 7 May 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was conducted virtually, allowing all participants to attend the meeting remotely. The overall objectives of the meeting were to discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the current activities of the participating WHO collaborating centres, and to share information on activities related to TB, HIV viral hepatitis and STI and the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants included representatives from WHO collaborating centres on TB, HIV, viral hepatitis and STI based in the WHO European Region and staff from the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

### KEYWORDS

TUBERCULOSIS  
MULTIDRUG-RESISTANT TUBERCULOSIS  
HIV  
VIRAL HEPATITIS  
STI  
COVID-19  
WHO COLLABORATING CENTRES

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## **Abbreviations**

CC	Collaborating centre
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
JTH	Joint TB, HIV and Viral Hepatitis Programme of WHO Regional Office for Europe
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
LTBI	Latent tuberculosis infection
MDR-TB	Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis
STI	Sexually transmitted infections
TB	Tuberculosis

## **Introduction**

The WHO collaborating centres (WHO CCs) on tuberculosis (TB), HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (STI) have played important roles in capacity-building, research and evidence development, scaling-up evidence-based interventions and implementing the latest WHO policy guidance and recommendations. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely affected the WHO European Region, the WHO Regional Office for Europe organized second coordinating meeting of all existing WHO CCs based in the Region, with the objective of discussing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on activities related to TB, HIV, viral hepatitis and STI and to share information on COVID-19 activities that link to TB, HIV, viral hepatitis and STI.

The meeting was held on 7 May 2020 and, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was conducted virtually via Zoom, allowing all participants to attend the meeting remotely. Simultaneous translations in English and Russian were provided and the meeting was recorded.

The meeting consisted of updates given by representatives of the WHO CCs. In preparation for the meeting, each WHO CC was asked to share answers to three questions on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their activities on TB/HIV/viral hepatitis and STI as WHO CCs.

Opening remarks were given by Dr Masoud Dara, Coordinator of Communicable Diseases, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Dr Askar Yedilbayev, Team Lead TB, WHO Regional Office for Europe, and Dr Nicole Seguy, Team Lead HIV, WHO Regional Office for Europe. Dr Ogtay Gozalov, Medical Officer, Joint Tuberculosis, HIV and Viral Hepatitis Programme was the responsible officer for the meeting.

This report summarizes the updates provided by each WHO CC and the main action points for the way forward. The list of participants of the meeting is in Annex 1 and the responses to the three questions sent to all WHO CCs prior to the meeting in Annex 2.

## Opening

Dr Masoud Dara, Coordinator of Communicable Diseases, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Dr Askar Yedilbayev, Team Lead TB, WHO Regional Office for Europe, and Dr Nicole Seguy, Team Lead HIV, WHO Regional Office for Europe, welcomed the participants. Since the previous meeting of the WHO CCs on HIV, TB, viral hepatitis and STI, the situation has changed with the worldwide impact of COVID-19, and with the particularly severe effects on the countries of the WHO European Region. This has meant that staff in many of the WHO CCs have been moved to other functions, which has had implications on the planned and ongoing activities within the workplans.

In these trying times, it is essential that efforts and experiences are coordinated and aligned both to ensure continued progress, but also to prevent the achievements made over the last few years being lost due to the changed situation. In addition, the new situation may give rise to renewed opportunities in the area of HIV, TB, viral hepatitis and STI. It is therefore important that we continue to collaborate and support each other across organizations and countries to adequately address both the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic's impact on HIV, TB, viral hepatitis and STI activities.

## Information from WHO collaborating centres

### Information from WHO CC for HIV Strategic Information, Croatia (Dr Stjepan Oreskovic)

- The work programme and activities have been moderately to severely affected by both the COVID-19 pandemic and an earthquake, which has made the use of facilities difficult.
- Courses and workshops have been cancelled or postponed and distant learning courses are being explored.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has requested the development of regional programmes and projects related to COVID-19 surveillance, including a research project using data from the National Institute of Public Health on COVID-19 infection in elderly people who are self-isolating. The research project is linked to Google Trends with the objective of developing a model to develop predictive capacities for future epidemics.

### Information from WHO CC on HIV and TB Coinfection, National Medical Research Centre for Phthisiopulmonology and Infectious Diseases of the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation (Dr Olga Demikhova)

- Activities have been moderately affected by COVID-19.
- In Moscow, which is the area in the Russian Federation most severely affected by COVID-19, all TB health care personal receive training organized by the Ministry of Health on the management of COVID-19 in TB patients.
- Recommendations for TB patients on the prevention of COVID-19 and guidance for continuing treatment during the pandemic have been developed.
- TB patients discharged from hospitals have their condition and treatment monitored remotely.
- All staff at the WHO CC have been trained on prevention, diagnostics and treatment of COVID-19, as have pulmonologists and TB specialists.

### Information from WHO CC for MDR-TB, Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases of Riga East University Hospital, Latvia (Dr Liga Kuksa)

- Activities have been moderately affected by COVID-19.

- Training sessions, symposiums and workshops have been cancelled or postponed until the Autumn. Courses on drug-resistant TB to be offered online are under consideration.
- Webinars, which will include a focus on COVID-19 and TB, are planned for late May 2020. The main objective will be to draw attention to the risks of the neglect of TB and delayed TB diagnoses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The implementation of the new WHO consolidated guidelines will not be postponed. In the Baltic states, a reluctant approach to introduce latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) testing of people with HIV has been observed. Colleagues are encouraged not to fall behind on the introduction of LTBI testing during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In general, the centre has undergone a shift to a more online approach; for example, using Zoom with translation options. This has proven to be very useful.

**Information from WHO CC for Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases at the Fondazione S Maugeri, Italy (Dr Giovanni Battista Migliori)**

- Activities have been only moderately affected by COVID-19, with the exception of all missions and other travel, which have all been cancelled or postponed. Research projects continue as planned or perhaps even more efficiently due to time freed up by cancelled meetings and travel.
- Training sessions have been postponed until the Autumn, and preparations are being carried out to allow for sessions to be carried out virtually, if necessary at that time.
- The centre is working with the WHO Regional Office and Headquarters to create and coordinate a global database on TB and COVID-19. Through the Joint TB, HIV and Viral Hepatitis Programme of the WHO Regional Office for Europe (JTH), two scientific papers based on cohort studies are under review for publication. Data is being collected through the network of patients with TB and COVID-19 with the objective of creating a big dataset on the topic and to enable study of the interaction between COVID-19 and TB in more detail and develop guidance for clinical management.

**Information from WHO CC for New Drugs and New Treatment for MDR-TB, Minsk, Belarus, Ms Viktoriya Sokolovskaya**

- Since all travel is restricted, missions and training sessions have been cancelled or postponed.
- Online training of experts in Belarus and an event for International Consiliums are being carried out virtually.
- Activities to protect TB patients during the COVID-19 pandemic are being developed.
- All providers are being encouraged to continue monitoring and treating TB patients through online video services.
- Collaboration with the Global Fund has been initiated on securing TB drugs for the upcoming period, because of concerns about drugs arriving on time due to the closing of borders.

**Information from WHO CC for Tuberculosis Laboratory Strengthening, Fondazione Centro San Raffaele, Italy (Dr Daniela Maria Cirillo and Dr Riccardo Alagna)**

- Activities have been moderately affected by COVID-19.
- Diagnostic activities continue, but procedures have been changed as samples for TB could contain COVID-19.

- Work is ongoing on a better understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Africa and to identify how best to support the African TB laboratories during the pandemic.
- Together with STOP TB Italy, a research project on TB and COVID-19 infection has been initiated based on cohort data from hospitals. An interesting initial finding is that immunological deviations in patients has been observed; for example, striking findings in the responses to interferon-gamma release assay (IGRA) tests. Data collection on this is ongoing.
- Collaboration with countries we historically work with on TB activities has decreased over the past 2 months and we have observed a decrease in TB diagnoses of more than 70% in these countries.
- All training sessions will be offered online for the rest of 2020 and no travel is expected until 2021. Free online refresher training sessions are being considered to be offered to everyone who has received training in the past few years.
- Further operational research is needed on the impact of the economic crisis deriving from the COVID-19 pandemic and how it will impact the work in the Region.

**Information from Robert Koch Institute, Germany, applying for the status of WHO CC on Viral Hepatitis and HIV (Dr Sandra Dudareva)**

- Activities have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with many colleagues heavily involved in management of the German COVID-19 response. This affects TB projects and studies as well as international collaboration. Some low-level activities are still taking place, but most are postponed until the Autumn.
- Robert Koch Institute is in general collaborating with countries across the Region and providing support to, for example, Armenia and Moldova in the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Information from Israeli Ministry of Health, applying for the status of WHO CC on TB (Dr Daniel Chemtob)**

- Activities have been moderately affected by COVID-19, and the situation is progressively returning to more normal conditions.
- TB activities continue as normal, but we would like to participate in research on the impact of serotesting to explore if TB patients are at higher risk of COVID-19.

**Information from WHO CC on HIV and Viral Hepatitis at CHIP, University of Copenhagen, Denmark (Dr Dorte Raben)**

- Activities have been severely affected by COVID-19.
- CHIP is involved in a number of global randomized trials on COVID-19 treatment.
- For future research on the interaction between COVID-19 and TB, HIV and viral hepatitis, it might be worth exploring if it makes sense to include questions on COVID-19 on the annual questionnaire for our observational study of HIV patients. This does, however, require a large data set and would have to be carried out across countries as the number of coinfecting people is still low.
- CHIP is involved in European Testing Week. Testing has been heavily affected by the pandemic. We are trying to gather information on the virtual activities and self-testing initiatives that are being rolled out due to COVID-19 constraints and to find out if there is potential for more of these as we progress to more normal conditions, and for countries that previously have been reluctant to implement these kinds of activities.



**Information from WHO CC on TB and HIV in Moscow (Dr Anastasiya Samoylova and Dr Irina Vasilyeva).**

- Activities have been moderately affected by COVID-19. Most activities are continuing, but workshops and training sessions have been postponed.
- Guidelines for clinical management of patients with coinfection of TB and COVID-19 have been developed as well as recommendations for prevention of COVID-19 in TB patients and recommendations for the continuation of TB treatment.
- We have organized webinars to offer training on different aspects of COVID-19.
- We are maintaining databases on TB and COVID-19. More recommendations and information will be provided.

**Information from WHO CC for Training in Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis, Novosibirsk Tuberculosis Research Institute (Dr Irina Felker)**

- Activities have been moderately affected by COVID-19, with all face-to-face activities cancelled or postponed.
- Clinical data is being collected for patients with TB or HIV and COVID-19, although the number of coinfecting patients is still low.
- Support has been provided to the Siberian region on TB and COVID-19, including the preparation of online training on multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and COVID-19.
- Some online training is being provided.

**Information from WHO CC for TB/HIV Coinfection and for TB Elimination, University of Brescia, Italy (Dr Alberto Matteelli)**

- Activities have been severely affected by COVID-19.
- Much ongoing research on COVID-19 has been initiated.
- A revision of the impact of COVID-19 on routine visits of TB patients is in process, assessing the impact of breaks in the continuity of care on health.
- Data is being collected on the potential association between TB and COVID-19, so far there is, however, no indication of an association.

**Information from WHO CC for TB in Prisons, Azerbaijan (Dr Irada Mammadova)**

- Activities have been severely affected by COVID-19, and a shift to a different mode of operation has negatively impacted on activities. Many training sessions have been postponed.
- There is close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other institutions.
- So far, there are no patients coinfecting with TB and COVID-19.
- Special guidance on how to manage COVID-19 patients in prisons has been developed.

**Information from WHO CC for Capacity Development in HIV Surveillance, Croatia (Dr Ivana Božićević)**

- We are interested in exploring the possibility of conducting a rapid assessment on the decline in out-reach services for key populations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the region and a possible decline in testing for STI. There is evidence from the USA on an increased rate of STI transmission due to reduction of staff availability caused by redeployment of staff to COVID-19 work. The Centre is interested in discussing further with other WHO CCs.

### **Information from Ms Donna Zilstorff, WHO CC focal point at WHO Regional Office for Europe**

- The Terms of Reference for the work programmes for WHO CCs remain the same despite the COVID-19 pandemic. However, if it is impossible to fulfil the work in these programmes, there should be an exchange of emails with the responsible officer and this can then be reflected in the annual report. The same applies for the re-planning of activities under the Terms of Reference or any additional work due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Follow-up actions for WHO CCs and WHO Regional Office for Europe**

- The continuation of communication, coordination and mutual support of the work of WHO CCs is essential and will be prioritized.
- Sharing of data and coordinating data collection to collect evidence, identify challenges and find solutions is essential, especially in preparation for an expected second wave of COVID-19.
- Governments' focus on fundraising for COVID-19 could be an opportunity to link this fundraising to other diseases such as TB, HIV, hepatitis and STI.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of contact tracing. The current situation could be an opportunity for TB and HIV to highlight and share experiences of contact tracing.
- European Testing Week (15–22 May) is an opportunity to go beyond EU countries and highlight the importance of testing, especially in countries who have previously showed reluctance about testing.
- WHO will continue to work closely with the team on monitoring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Further actions on viral hepatitis will be discussed with the Collaborating Centre in Georgia.
- With regard to TB, WHO will continue to support countries and work with the Collaborating Centre in Belarus on the upcoming release of WHO policy guidance on drug-resistant TB.
- Collaboration to strengthen surveillance on TB/COVID-19 coinfection across the Region with WHO Headquarters is in progress.
- In coordination with WHO Headquarters, a working group of WHO and the collaborating centres will look at the potential drug interactions on TB/MDR-TB and experimental treatments of COVID-19.
- Suggestions for multi-country studies and actions are welcome and WHO is happy to support and coordinate such studies.

## **Annex 1 List of participants**

### **Representatives from WHO collaborating centres:**

#### **Azerbaijan**

Dr Irada Mammadova

#### **Belarus**

Ms Viktoriya Sokolovskaya

#### **Croatia**

Dr Ivana Božičević

Dr Stjepan Oreskovic

#### **Denmark**

Dr Dorthe Raben

#### **Germany**

Dr Sandra Dudareva

#### **Italy**

Dr Alberto Matteelli

Dr Riccardo Alagna

Dr Daniela Maria Cirillo

#### **Israel**

Dr Daniel Chemtob

#### **Latvia**

Dr Liga Kuksa

#### **Russian Federation**

Dr Irina Vasilyeva

Dr Anastasiya Samoylova

Dr Atadjan Ergeshov

Dr Olga Demikhova

Dr Tatiana Tulkova

Dr Irina Felker

#### **WHO Regional Office for Europe**

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Dr Nicole Seguy

Dr Askar Yedilbayev

Dr Ogtay Gozalov

Dr Andrei Dadu

Dr Elena Vovc

Ms Donna Zilstorff

Ms Svitlana Vyshnevskaya

#### **WHO Country Office Georgia**

Dr Nino Mamulashvili

#### **Rapporteur**

Ms Nina Bjerglund Andersen

## Annex 2 Responses to questions sent to all WHO collaborating centres prior to the meeting

### WHO collaborating centres on TB, HIV, viral hepatitis and STI on strategic issues during the COVID-19 pandemic

Replies from countries					
Country/City	Contact person	Preferred dates	Q1. Impact on TB/HIV/HEP activities	Q2. Interventions/modified modus operandi	Q3. COVID-19-related activities
<b>Azerbaijan, Baku</b>	Elmira Gurbanova	Any time (representative of WHO CC on TB prevention and control in prison will participate as well)	Severe	Both international and local training sessions were postponed until, hopefully, Autumn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WHO CC contributed to Russian translation of WHO Guideline on preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention.</li> <li>COVID-19-related informational materials provided to medical and nonmedical prison staff.</li> <li>Participation in clinical case discussion of COVID-19/TB coinfecting patients</li> </ul>
<b>Belarus, Minsk</b>	Alena Sťahina	7 May 2020	Moderate to severe	Yes	Remote courses
<b>Croatia, Zagreb</b>	Professor Oresković Professor Božićević	8 May 2020	Moderate to severe (earthquake)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working from home.</li> <li>Spring training course postponed until Autumn exploring possibilities of distance teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing educational programmes and proposals for interventional and basic research projects.</li> <li>Participating in data analysis and modelling connecting Google Trends search data with official data to develop predictive capacities for future epidemics</li> </ul>

<b>Denmark</b>	Dorte Raben	5 or 7 May 2020 (Anne Raahauge, CHIP, will join the call)	Severe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings and training sessions have been postponed.</li> <li>• Research activities in TB/HIV/hepatitis scaled down, COVID-19 research scaled-up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are running a number of randomized trials through the INSIGHT network (testing remdesivir on 1 000 patients).</li> <li>• Spring European Testing Week in May has redirected focus and will gather adapted (virtual) experiences in the current situation across Europe</li> </ul>
<b>Italy</b>	Alberto Matteelli	Any time	Severe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All planned WHO meetings, international conferences, training courses were postponed or cancelled.</li> <li>• Research projects were suspended for several months.</li> <li>• Some training courses were modified to take place as online, distance, training.</li> <li>• The workplan of ongoing research activities were modified in order to cope with the epidemic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement in clinical management of COVID-19 patients, and in preparing standard operating procedures for hospital management of COVID-19 cases.</li> <li>• New research projects concerning COVID-19 were designed and implemented</li> </ul>
<b>Italy</b>	Daniella Cirillo	Any time	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training sessions on implementation of new diagnostic tools suspended.</li> <li>• Annual course on molecular diagnosis of DR-TB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genomic profile of virus.</li> <li>• Antibody test evaluation.</li> <li>• Literature research and publications on public COVID-19 response and TB/COVID-19 coinfection factors</li> </ul>

				<p>is still planned for November 2020.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WHO CC ITA-98 is working to find innovative solutions to continue to deliver the training programme.</li> <li>• TB laboratory activities reduced.</li> <li>• Operational research to improve TB care and control delayed but not affected.</li> <li>• Support monitoring of MDR-TB drug resistant rates: activities postponed</li> </ul>	
<b>Germ any</b>	Irina Felker	7 or 8 May	Moderate	We cancelled our MDR-TB training in June and looking for the opportunities to organize online training for TB specialists. We use technologies for online training, discussions and exchange of experience	We are at the stage of reprofiling our hospital for patients with combined pathology TB/CoviD-19

<b>Georgia</b>	Maia Tseriteli	All dates are fine. Request to change start time to 13:00 to enable NCDC Director, A. Gamkrelidze, to participate	Severe. Official establishment of WHO CC in Georgia was postponed	All planned activities cancelled/postponed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study tours to Georgia;</li> <li>• NCDC participation in WHO country missions;</li> <li>• International training sessions on hepatitis testing (incl. coinfections) and lab diagnostics.</li> </ul>	NCDC activities in GEO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in response and mitigation measures planning and implementation;</li> <li>• Development of national protocols on COVID-19 detection, prevention and control measures;</li> <li>• Disease detection, identification of contacts, validation and risk assessment;</li> <li>• Sample collection, laboratory testing; notification of responsible bodies;</li> <li>• Epidemiological surveillance / response action;</li> <li>• Provision of training sessions, relevant information to the medical staff, epidemiologists and other target groups in compliance with the WHO recommendations;</li> <li>• Monitoring of infection control measures for the prevention of spread of new coronavirus;</li> <li>• Informing the public about the risks associated with coronavirus disease, control and mitigation measures.</li> <li>• Printing and distribution of materials on COVID-19 prevention.</li> </ul>
<b>Germany</b>	Vivian Bremer	8 May 2020 (5 or 7 May would also be possible for RKI, not for Vivian)	No info	No info	No info
<b>Latvia</b>	Liga Kuksa		Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TB training for nurses and 4th Baltic States TB symposium planned for April and May have been postponed until Autumn.</li> </ul>	First webinar on 22 May (English/Russian language). Programme of the webinar will include the COVID-19 and TB topic

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DR-TB online courses are being considered</li> </ul>	
<b>Russia</b> <b>, Novosibirsk</b>	Irina Felker	7 and 8 May 2020	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MDR-TB training in June cancelled; possibilities to organize online training for TB specialists.</li> <li>Using technologies for online training, discussions and exchange of experience</li> </ul>	Reprofiling our hospital for patients with combined pathology TB/COVID-19
<b>Russia</b> <b>, Moscow</b>	Olga Demikhova	Not possible before 12 May	Moderate	<p>From mitigation to containment strategy, topics for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research areas related to counteracting the COVID-19 pandemic;</li> <li>Possible coinfection COVID-19/HIV/STI/HeP/TB;</li> <li>Development of the potential of artificial intelligence in the management of infectious diseases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Call centre at WHO CC to reply on COVID-19 related questions;</li> <li>Development of recommendations for TB patients on the prevention of COVID-19 and the rules for continuing treatment in a pandemic;</li> <li>Remote monitoring of the condition and treatment of TB patients discharged from hospitals;</li> <li>Pandemic response work (presentation of specialists on COVID-19 prevention);</li> <li>All staff at WHO CC has been trained on prevention, diagnostic and treatment of COVID-19;</li> <li>Training of pulmonologists and TB specialists.</li> </ul>
<b>Russia</b>	Irina Vasilyeva	08 May 2020	No info	No info	No info



<b>Slova kia</b>	Ivan Solovič	Any time	Moderate	WHO CC, with its team of trained Roma health assistants from marginalized population groups, is at the forefront of fighting COVID-19 in our country	TB services in Slovakia are now as guides to fighting COVID-19 for marginalized groups of the population



## **The WHO Regional Office for Europe**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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