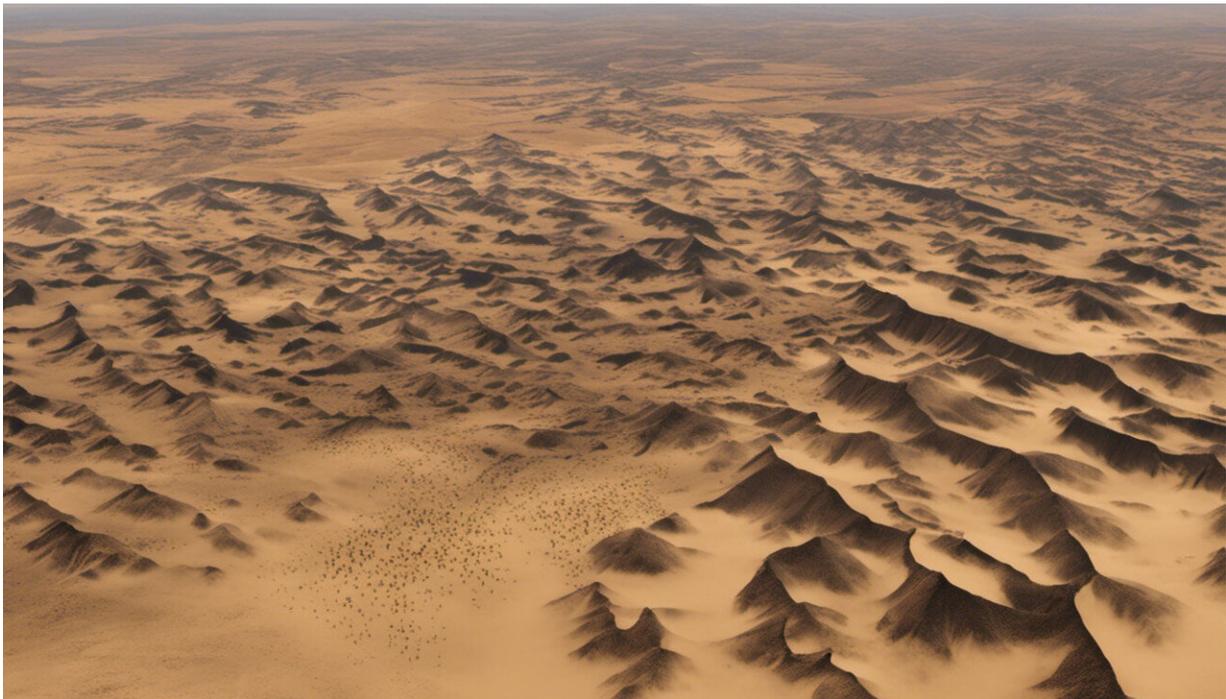


# African countries battle-ready to take on COVID-19

June 11 2020

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Experience combating Ebola has been a key element in the effective response of African nations to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to research out today from Oxford's Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science in collaboration with the African Research Network.

Published today in *Nature Medicine*, the study explains that there had been fears that Africa would be the next 'hotspot' for COVID-19: "Many predicted a heavy toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on Africa. Its weakened [health systems](#) were harbingers of a terrible outcome."

But the reality has been quite different, with Africa only moderately affected thus far by the pandemic. According to the research, expertise developed during previous epidemics, coupled with favorable younger demographics, climate, early and effective lockdown measures, and centralized public health infrastructure all played their part in helping African nations face the pandemic in relative good standing until now.

Author Professor Melinda Mills, Director of the Leverhulme Centre concludes, "There is reason for hope in Africa's response to COVID-19. The pessimistic outlook and prediction of the pandemic in Africa shows some early indications of hope. African countries continue to focus on fast and thorough contact tracing, ensuring quarantine and remaining vigilant in the upcoming weeks, which was key in halting past Ebola outbreaks."

Professor Mills says, "One reason that African nations have fared better than other areas of the world, such as US or the UK, is their rapid, early and even drastic measures. As early as 23 April, many African countries had already taken serious measures. We have much to learn from the way in which the countries that fought off Ebola, have handled the current crisis."

A major factor in the success to date can be attributed to their rapid and strict 'effective lockdown measures.' According to the study, "Countries that have experienced the Ebola epidemic were also at an advantage in combating COVID-19....when the first COVID-19 case in sub-Saharan Africa was diagnosed in Nigeria, [healthcare workers](#) were ready to use contact-tracing strategies...before it was too late. As soon as the case was

confirmed, other countries...began to take dire measures, such as closing borders and minimizing public gatherings."

It continues, "Senegal took severe measures, such as closing its borders and ensuring large gatherings were minimized, at a very early stage, within days of the first reported case...by early June, they had only 45 reported deaths."

According to the report, in the period up to 3 June, Africa seems to have been affected 'only moderately' by the virus, with some 156,000 cases and an estimated 4,391 deaths, across all 54 countries. Using World Health Organisation data, the researchers calculated that Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and South Africa had the most immediate risk of the virus, largely because of the connections between China and their major cities.

Of the sub-Saharan nations, South Africa has been hardest hit. As of 3 June, there were 35,812 cases and 755 deaths. Egypt, meanwhile, saw 1,052 deaths in the same period. Yet the continent's most populous nation, Nigeria, with an estimated 196 million citizens, had experienced just 314 deaths and the holiday destinations of Tanzania and Kenya had reported fewer than 100 deaths between them. Comparatively speaking, as of 3 June, Nigeria has experienced 53 deaths per million, compared to 4,094 in the United Kingdom and 5,534 in the United States.

The research team maintains, the low number of severe cases, could be partially attributed to the younger demographic with only 3% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa over the age of 65. Another 'plausible theory' for the lower morbidity rate in African countries could be climate, "Temperature and humidity are known factors in the transmissions of other coronaviruses."

**More information:** Bamba Gaye et al. Socio-demographic and epidemiological consideration of Africa's COVID-19 response: what is

the possible pandemic course?, *Nature Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/s41591-020-0960-y](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0960-y)

Provided by University of Oxford

Citation: African countries battle-ready to take on COVID-19 (2020, June 11) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-african-countries-battle-ready-covid-.html>

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