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Global Health in times of Covid-19

According to the World Health Organization, at least half of the world's population does not have access to essential health care. In times of Covid-19, the most vulnerable countries will be worst affected.

The current pandemic underscores the critical importance of having strong health systems as well as solid collaborations to effectively address emergencies. Beyond developing novel treatments and vaccines for the disease, we must ensure that health systems are able to deliver care by addressing the gaps in awareness, accessibility, affordability, and availability of treatment.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global health challenge that will dramatically impact low- and middle-income countries. The health systems in those countries are already struggling with a double burden of infectious diseases such as malaria and schistosomiasis, and the rising incidence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. The additional burden of Covid-19 could overwhelm already fragile systems.

More than ever, in these challenging times, we, the Global Health department at Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany remain committed to our mission to improve the health of underserved populations in low- and middle-income countries through our investments and our innovations in science & technology, together with our external partners.

With our ongoing efforts in Global Health, we also support the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and we provide sustainable solutions for future emerging threats:

- We strengthen health systems with our investments in health infrastructure, awareness raising and training;
- We ensure the continued implementation of our clinical trials and programs, including for supply of medications, for and in low- and middle-income countries;



- We provide assets and expertise through strategic collaborations, including the [Consortium alongside Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), and to help health systems reduce the impact of Covid-19;
- We support our partners with protective equipment and technologies.

As we continue to share our capabilities and networks with the global community to control the pandemic, we also seek to strengthen low- and middle-income countries with programs that build more resilient health systems that are capable of handling not only the current Covid-19 pandemic, but also the challenges of non-communicable diseases, infectious diseases, and future pandemics. We believe that investments and activities in health systems strengthening are one of the most sustainable forms of support as they equip countries with the means and skills to deal on their own with a wide variety of health emergencies. It is only through our continuous commitment and collaboration that we can help to protect the most vulnerable populations from falling through the gaps in their fragile health systems.



Global Health at Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany has consolidated detailed information on the expert contributions from its different unit.

Global Health Institute

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have increased our collaborative efforts by:

- safeguarding our ongoing projects on malaria and schistosomiasis that are conducted by partners in endemic countries;
- providing expertise and assets for new health solutions such as providing compounds for the R&D screening group;
- evaluating and implementing proposals to support “anti SARS-CoV-2 research”.

In addition, as part of our evolving strategy at the Global Health Institute, we emphasize the importance of building and enhancing health system preparedness, strengthening and resilience to prepare for and effectively respond to crises. Some prominent examples include:

- The GALAC program for laboratory capacity building in Ghana
- The [PAVON](#) program for epidemiology mapping of malaria in more than 10 African countries
- The [A2W](#) (access to water) initiative for schistosomiasis in Senegal
- The Master Program in Uganda to test degree of resistance of bacterial pathogens

More at: www.emdglobalhealthinstitute.com

Although many of these programs initially focus on specific diseases (e.g. malaria, schistosomiasis), they are all aimed at building general capacity and expertise that will support health policy making and render health care systems more resilient to many different types of health crises.

In addition, through our Company’s coordinated effort, we, at the Institute, are concretely contributing expertise and assets to various high-level working groups, including the ones convened by EDCTP (European and Developing Countries Clinical Trial Partnership), the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the Covid-19 Clinical Research Coalition.

The most vulnerable patients are close to our heart and with Covid-19, anxiety increases for all of us. But it is also in times like these that our expertise and perseverance will help to achieve our vision of a world free of infectious diseases.



Access to Health

Access to Health enables our Company's commitment to sustainable access to health solutions in low- and middle-income countries. We implement and enhance health access programs through our shared value initiatives, global health partnerships, and access to medicine strategy.

Our Access to Health efforts to enhance health systems take a holistic and comprehensive approach across the value chain to contribute to the creation of strong and resilient health systems in countries: we drive change through the 4As of access: availability, affordability, awareness and accessibility.

Within our Health System Strengthening approach, Accessibility challenges around supply chain strengthening is a critical component to ensure health solutions reach communities and patients. Through our Access Delivery Mentorship, we help distributors in underserved areas improve access of patients to critical health solutions. Currently, we are working with three distributors in Tanzania in collaboration with Business for Health Solutions.

We also seek to address Affordability challenges around intellectual property. Through our Open Innovation Initiative we partner with WIPO Re:Search and DNDi to accelerate early discovery for infectious diseases through IP-sharing. Our [Open Global Health Library](#) helps early stage researchers in low- and middle-income countries to identify potential compounds that can be used to address the burden of infectious diseases. It also builds up local capacity and expertise that will help countries to better deal with future health crises.

Strengthening the health systems in low- and middle-income countries is a core pillar of our Access to Health strategy and is a critical factor in addressing the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Access to Health is committed to ensuring patients in those countries are not left behind as we develop new and sustainable programs for health access.



Schistosomiasis Elimination Program

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany continues its work in the battle against the neglected tropical disease (NTD) schistosomiasis also during the uncertainties of the Covid-19 pandemic. WHO has published an interim guidance for affected countries to temporarily suspend their mass treatment campaigns for NTDs and most African governments have followed this recommendation. However, some countries continue to protect their population against the devastating consequences of NTDs.

Our Company adapts to the rapidly evolving situation on the African continent by guaranteeing the supply of praziquantel where needed. We remain in constant dialogue with our partner WHO, who continues working closely with governments to ensure our donated medicines are managed appropriately. To avoid wastage and expiry of tablets is key. We monitor the ever-changing circumstances closely and stay prepared for when restrictions are lifted again.

NTDs are poverty related diseases that affect the poorest in low- and middle-income countries. NTDs like schistosomiasis, have severe impacts on the general health and immune systems of affected people, which in turn may put them at an even higher risk of being infected with Covid-19. However, interventions against NTDs clearly can have positive impacts on preventing the spread of Covid-19. The existing national NTD programs are the networks that are now called to action to implement the WHO measures against the pandemic.

These networks, consisting of country authorities and officials, donor companies, international organizations, implementing partners and academia, play a crucial role in fund raising, advocacy and awareness raising to enable countries to implement Covid-19 interventions. Furthermore, educating the population in basic principles of hygiene and sanitation are cornerstones in the fight against NTDs, and are essential measures to prevent the spread of other infectious diseases like Covid-19. High impact can be achieved through promoting health messages on handwashing, providing handwashing facilities and favoring other WASH activities (water, sanitation and hygiene), especially if trained community NTD workers and community-based drug distribution platforms continue treatments for NTDs where possible.

As part of our integrated elimination strategy, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany has delivered free of charge treatments for [schistosomiasis](#) for more than a decade and will continue to do so until schistosomiasis is eliminated as a public health problem. Our company also has a long history of supporting WASH projects and health education activities. One successful example is a joint project with the Federal Ministry of Health and the NALA Foundation in the South-West of Ethiopia.

Strong health systems are crucial for any kind of health crisis and although the Covid-19 pandemic may be the most recent one, continuous interventions on NTDs remain highly relevant. The Global Health team at Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany will continue using its expertise and experience to make sure that these devastating diseases are not falling off the radar during the Covid-19 health emergency.

