



**Eighth Meeting of the COVID-19 Ministerial Coordinating Committee (MCC) of the
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**

5 April 2022

(Videoconference)

COMMUNIQUE

1. The eight meeting of the Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Health (MCCH) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, took place by videoconference on 05 April 2022, under the chairmanship of **Dr Adeleke MAMORA**, the Honourable Minister of State for Health of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
2. The following ECOWAS Ministers of Health or their duly designated representatives participated in the meeting:

Republic of Benin	Prof Benjamin HOUNKPATIN
Republic of Cabo Verde	Dr Arlindo Nascimento do ROSÁRIO , represented by Dr Evandro MONTEIRO, Secretary of State for Health
Republic of Cote D'Ivoire	Mr Pierre DIMBA , represented by Prof Joseph BENIE, Head of NPHI
Republic of The Gambia	Dr Ahmadou Lamin SAMATEH
Republic of Ghana	Mr Kwaku AGYEMAN-MANU , represented by Alhaji Mahama Asei SEINI, Deputy Minister of Health
Republic of Guinea Bissau	Presidente Dioniso CUMBA
Republic of Liberia	Dr Wilhemina JALLAH
Federal Republic of Nigeria	Dr (Senator) Adeleke MAMORA (Chair of the meeting)
Republic of Senegal	Mr Abdoulaye DIOUF SARR
Republic of Sierra Leone	Dr Austin DEMBY
The Togolese Republic	Prof Moustafa MIJIYAWA

3. The President of the ECOWAS Commission, **H.E. Dr Jean-Claude Kassi BROU** was represented by the Director-General of WAHO and Co-Chair of the Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Health, **Prof Stanley OKOLO**.
4. The Opening Ceremony featured remarks from the following dignitaries:
 - a. Dr Adeleke MAMORA, Honourable Minister of State for Health of Nigeria representing the Chair of the ECOWAS COVID-19 Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Health.
 - b. HE Dr Jean Claude Kassi BROU, President of the ECOWAS Commission, represented by the DG of WAHO, Prof Stanley OKOLO
 - c. Hon. Kwaku AGYEMAN-MANU, Minister of Health of Ghana, Chair of the Assembly of Health Ministers (represented by Hon. Alhaji Mahama Asei SEINI, Deputy Minister of Health of Ghana).
5. After the Opening Ceremony, the Ministers of Health were updated on:
 - a. Tasks assigned to WAHO from the 7th MCCH.
 - b. COVID-19 Situation Report.
 - c. Member States' Experiences of Opening Borders – Senegal, Cote D'Ivoire and Ghana.
 - d. Recommendations on Regional Approach.
6. The Ministers were briefed on the status of implementation of tasks assigned to WAHO and to Member States by the 7th Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Health meeting held virtually on 20 August 2021. They appreciated that the various tasks were being satisfactorily implemented.

7. The Ministers were informed that the ECOWAS region recorded a total of 835,850 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 11,334 (1.4%) deaths and 817,329 (97.8%) recoveries, as at 03 April 2022. Thus, 0.8% of the total confirmed cases are currently active. In the last 5 weeks, the number of confirmed cases and deaths have declined consistently, indicating that the 4th pandemic wave has come to an end.
8. Ministers appreciated the progress made in the preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the acquisition and distribution of antigen-based rapid diagnostic tests (Ag-RDT) from the Institut Pasteur Foundation, Dakar; the expansion of laboratory genomic sequencing and bioinformatics capacity for COVID-19 in the region; and the ongoing laboratory accreditation and certification programme.
9. The Ministers were updated on the current status of COVID-19 vaccination in the region. As at 19 March 2022, the region has received a total of about 154 million dose of various types of COVID-19 vaccines out of which 79% were received through the COVAX facilities. All member states, except Cabo Verde missed the 40% vaccination target by December 2021. Meanwhile the 70% vaccination target by June 2022 remain elusive.
10. The Ministers noted with satisfaction the diligent efforts of Member States to acquire vaccines from multiple sources, the establishment of a vaccines exchange platform in the region, and progress towards achieving local production of vaccines. However, the Ministers expressed concerns about the low vaccination uptake in the region which stands at about 14% of the population.
11. The Ministers were updated on the current status of the cross border travels in the region. In spite of the ECOWAS harmonized guidelines for cross border movement, trade and transport, some Member States are implementing a variety of travel protocols different from the agreed harmonized guidelines. Ministers were informed of the progress made to connect all Member States to the WAHO/BIOMARS travel platform for digitized verification of PCR tests. Five (5) MS have been connected while other 3 are ready to join the platform in about three (3) weeks.
12. The Ministers appreciated the lessons learned from the various strategies applied to contain the pandemic so far, particularly in relation to human health and socioeconomic consequences of non-pharmaceutical interventions. They noted that the omicron variant causes milder disease with low hospitalization and mortality rates; that the results of the seroprevalence studies conducted in our region revealed that a significant proportion of citizens in some Member States has had initial contact with COVID-19 virus; and that vaccination can protect and reduce mortality among the vulnerable groups.
13. The Ministers reaffirmed their determination to continue cross-border collaboration in the fight against recurrent epidemics in the region and to continue promoting the implementation of a harmonized travel protocol across the region.
14. The Ministers noted with concern:
 - a. The overall socioeconomic consequences of the current pandemic.
 - b. The low COVID-19 vaccine coverage in the sub-region since vaccination roll-out started in March 2021.
 - c. The porous land borders, particularly those that are unmanned and the current lack of mechanisms for testing of travellers at these crossings.

- d. The non-compliance by a few Member States with the directive of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Governments to cap travel-related COVID-19 test fee at \$50 for ECOWAS nationals.
15. The Ministers agreed that in view of the current evolution of the pandemic and the need for public health measures with minimal socioeconomic distortions:
- a. The following measures are hereby adopted for implementation by all Member States:
 - i. **Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions**
 - Wearing of masks in public places is recommended but not mandatory;
 - Promote and maintain enhanced hand and respiratory hygiene practices;
 - All social and religious activities can resume at full capacity provided participants are fully vaccinated.
 - ii. **Surveillance/testing**
 - Promote use of Ag-RDT for population testing while de-emphasizing PCR as diagnostic test. Make RDT kits widely available to provide, especially surge capacity during waves;
 - Limit the use of PCR testing to Reference Centres for the purpose of enhanced surveillance and monitoring of new variants (using representative samples) to facilitate early detection of the presence of variants, to ascertain epidemiological trends and guide containment measures;
 - iii. **Vaccination**
 - Vaccinations remain a crucial component of the response. MS should aggressively promote vaccination in addition to prioritizing the vulnerable/ at risk population with a view to achieving 70% population coverage by or soon after June 2022 in line with timelines agreed in Africa;
 - iv. **Travel restrictions/PCR testing for air travellers**
 - Fully vaccinated travelers should be allowed entry without presenting a negative PCR test result and would not be tested on arrival;
 - Those travelers who are not fully vaccinated would need to provide a negative PCR test result of not more than 72 hours and would be offered vaccination on arrival;
 - v. **Land and sea borders**
 1. Fully vaccinated travelers should be allowed entry without presenting a negative Ag-RDT test result and would not be tested on arrival;
 2. Those travelers who are not fully vaccinated would need to provide a negative Ag-RDT test result of not more than 72 hours and would be offered vaccination on arrival;
 - vi. **Risk communication and community engagement**
 - Remain consistent with current messages promoting hand and respiratory hygiene, use of AgRDT and vaccinations.
 - b. Member States should accelerate compliance with the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State's directive on harmonized travel including capping of travel related COVID-19 test fee for ECOWAS citizens at \$50 for PCR. RDT should be no more than \$10 where it is charged for.

16. The Ministers thanked His Excellency President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, the ECOWAS COVID-19 Champion for his leadership of the regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic and provision of logistic support to WAHO. They also thanked the ECOWAS Commission, WAHO, WHO Regional Office for Africa, Africa Union, Africa CDC, Donors and Development Partners for their support.

Done via Videoconference this 5th Day of April 2022

For the ECOWAS Ministers of Health

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Adeleke MAMORA', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Adeleke MAMORA

**Honourable Minister of State for Health of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
for Chair of the ECOWAS Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Health**