

Covid-19: Let's not forget Africa!

Press release from the French National Academy of Medicine

May 6, 2020

The "Covid-19" monitoring unit of the Academy of Medicine has created an "Africa Group" which, with the help of African colleagues engaged on the front line in the fight against the pandemic, has made the following observations:

Africa is no longer spared by the spread of the pandemic: the milestone of 40,000 sick and 1,500 dead has been crossed;

Even if the epidemic seems to be progressing slowly on the African continent, the conditions and risk factors for its rapid spread are present : overcrowding in large cities, poverty, precariousness and promiscuity, insalubrity, lack of water and soap, fragile healthcare systems, socio-political instability and armed conflicts are all risk factors for massive epidemic outbreaks, despite the two favourable conditions that are the tropical climate and the average young age of the population.

The scarcity of BSL2 safety laboratories and the low availability of RT-PCR tests makes it difficult to search for thousands of contacts;

The frequency of communicable diseases (AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, viral hepatitis, cholera, Ebola virus disease...) and the progression of chronic diseases (diabetes, hypertension, cancers, addictions...) multiply the risk factors that expose populations to severe forms of Covid-19.

In agreement with its African partners, **the National Academy of Medicine recommends:**

- to raise the international public awareness regarding the unpreparedness of the African continent to cope with the progression of the Covid-19 epidemic;
- to provide health professionals and social workers with the means of protection they need to prevent nosocomial transmission of the virus;
- to safeguard the continuity of curative and preventive care (vaccination and family planning), particularly for the benefit of the most vulnerable groups (the elderly, pregnant and nursing women, children under 5 years of age);
- to strengthen controls to fight against falsified medicines, the mafia trafficking in which is constantly increasing;
- to facilitate the performance of tests for the detection of SARS-CoV-2 by RT-PCR making full use of the GeneXpert automated systems deployed in many African countries for the diagnosis of tuberculosis;
- to promote the acquisition of medical oxygen, which is essential for the management of hospitalized cases, and to encourage the establishment of an international stockpile of respirators for Africa;
- to initiate therapeutic and vaccine trials in Africa, after having obtained the formal agreement of the Ministries of Health and validation by an ethics committee;
- to facilitate collaboration between scientific teams from the South and the North;
- to take into account sociological data and to obtain the consent of the communities, so that they can make the appropriate decisions in the fight against Covid-19, while respecting human rights.