



Pandemic in a Pandemic: Urgent Call to permit physical activities during the pandemic period in Rwanda



Rwanda's restrictions during the pandemic

WHO announced COVID-19 a global pandemic as of March 2020. Since then countries imposed restriction to mitigate the pandemic spread including lockdown and other social distancing requirements.

Since March 2020, the Rwandan government through Ministry of Health notified the community the first case, then mitigation actions started to be enforced in place. The measures included social distancing including lockdowns. The imposed restrictions affected negatively on the level of physical activities (PA) and the life style of the Rwandan residents. WHO recommends engaging in at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate activity and 75 to 150 minutes of the vigorous level of weekly physical activity (1-3). People with chronic health issues are recommended to continue PA and reducing sedentary life behavior. The reduction of PA is linked to increase of mental health disorder and other health problems (4).

Physical activities in pandemic

Physical activities are key factors to reduce mental and physical health issues. During COVID-19 restrictions including lockdown, there were reduced opportunities to be physically resulting in negative impact on the health outcomes especially for those with chronic health issues.

The combination of the COVID-19 restrictions to mitigate the spread of the pandemic on one hand and accumulated risks of inactivity on the other hand creates a vulnerable situation for all including down stream health outcomes.

When making decisions related to pandemic restrictions, countries such as Rwanda are encouraged to develop strategies and campaign for continued physical activities including home based activities to avoid a pandemic in a pandemic.

Priority Actions for the MOH

- 1 **Advocate** for a combined approach to mitigate the spread of pandemic and continuous physical exercises
- 2 **Work closely** with other Ministry of infrastructure and Ministry of sport to design and avail community based facilitated (Infrastructures, coaching, etc.)
- 3 **Establish** a home based sport activities monitoring and reporting system through community health staff using pedometers and other wearable tools



Implications

Health Implication:

- PA will increase the health outcomes including reduction of NCDs risk factors, reducing mental health problems, vaccination deployment and efficacy, etc. while increasing the stakeholders and community engagement

Financial and human resource implication:

- A healthy and fit population will increase productivity at the household and national level
- Ministry of health will need to use the national existing TV channel (RTV) and private platforms to channel the campaigns
- Community health workers will need to be mobilised to campaign and follow up the PA activities in the communities
- Anticipated reduction of the health care services on government and private insurance bills

Infrastructure needs:

These include enhancement at:

- Schools' facilities
- District and other local governance facilities
- Faith based infrastructures
- Any other government facilities (Roads, sports courts, etc.)



[https://rwanda.un.org/en/9632-kigali-car-free-day-on-21 July 2019](https://rwanda.un.org/en/9632-kigali-car-free-day-on-21-July-2019)

Key Findings

1 The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have reduced physical activity level

2 Physical activity reduces the risk factors of NCDs

3 Maintaining physical activity is critical during imposed confinements

Reference:

1. Stockwell S, Trott M, Tully M, Shin J, Barnett Y, Butler L, et al. Changes in physical activity and sedentary behaviours from before to during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: a systematic review. *BMJ open sport & exercise medicine*. 2021;7(1):e000960.
2. Caputo EL, Reichert FF. Studies of physical activity and COVID-19 during the pandemic: a scoping review. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*. 2020;17(12):1275-84.
3. Dwyer MJ, Pasini M, De Dominicis S, Righi E. Physical activity: Benefits and challenges during the COVID - 19 pandemic. *Scandinavian journal of medicine & science in sports*. 2020;30(7):1291.
4. Impact of COVID-19 Lock-Downs on Nature Connection in Southern and Eastern Africa. <https://www.mdpi.com/1668748>