

EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA HEALTH EMERGENCY GROUP
TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON SURVEILLANCE, PoE & LAB

CROSS-BORDER MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN EAST & SOUTHERN AFRICA

Background

While most countries in the region have instituted lockdown measures, movement of cargo has been allowed to continue in almost all countries in the East and Southern Africa region. As a result, truck drivers and their assistants continue to commute across borders to deliver essential goods. Recent reports have highlighted that, although movement is permitted, there have been considerable delays at most borders, due to health screening, testing and other certification procedures introduced since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

During epidemic it is recognized that truck drivers are traveling with the crew/assistants for long hours and have close interaction with other people during pick-up and delivery of cargo in country of departure, destination and along the routes. In addition, during the travel they stop-over in selected areas and have social interaction and close contact with communities. This frequent and close contacts with other people during the journey has the potential to expose them to contaminated items and risk of COVID infection in addition to pose an additional threat for the spread of the epidemic within countries. However, most countries have put in place measures to monitor the movement of trucks and requirements to stop only at designated places.

As of 15 May 2020, increasing cases of truck drivers testing positive for COVID 19 have been reported in the sub-region. Recently all forty-three cases tested positive in Uganda in one day were truck drivers originating from neighbouring countries. Increasing positive cases have also been identified in Rwanda, among truck drivers originating from neighbouring countries. Given the very high movement of truck drivers in the region and health vulnerabilities associated with such work, including sub-optimal access to healthcare services, there is concern that, unless properly handled, the commercial corridors in East and Southern Africa (ESA) will become one of the main routes of cross-border propagation of the COVID-19 outbreak in the region. Additionally, the porosity of the borders with associated cross-border movement of East and Southern Africa citizens across land borders presents a challenge. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop and implement a coordinated sub-regional strategy to prevent, control and suppress cross-border transmission of COVID-19 in ESA countries through harmonized approach to POEs surveillance, testing of transnational truck drivers and their assistants, timely operational, strategic cross-border information sharing and the use of mobility and surveillance data to guide the investment of public health actions along major transport corridors. There is also need to readjust interventions in a way to reduce waiting time at PoE and avoid congestion of truck drivers in an area that can further attract other people. This will be done with appropriate selection of type of testing to be conducted at PoE and related SOP.

Meanwhile, to address the problem, some countries in the region have started implementing different measures individually, without a proper sub-regional consultation.

- **Uganda:** Initiated – testing for COVID-19 of all truck drivers entering the country. There is however a challenge with turnaround time and trucks are allowed to proceed while waiting for results. They are beginning to deploy laboratories at borders to expedite testing time and reduce delays.
- **Rwanda** – Initiated testing for COVID-19 for all truck drivers

- **Kenya** – Have finalized the protocol for exit testing. Testing of outbound truck drivers has commenced.
- **South Sudan** - Has started testing drivers and passengers entering through Nimule border crossing from Uganda

Major operational gaps

- Absence of a harmonized approach on public health measures for prevention of COVID-19 especially transnational truck drivers including lack of sub-regional framework for information sharing in line with IHR (2005) as well as the IDSR guidelines, especially for cross-border tracking of drivers who test positive to COVID-19
- There are no harmonized testing strategies among the ESA countries making interpretation of findings difficult and creating potential opportunities for transmission to go under detected amongst a highly mobile population.
- Limited arrangement for testing at PoEs whenever required and long turnaround time for sharing test results at the points of entry is concerning and leading to delay in instituting the required measures. This also creates possible congestion of truck crews
- Lack of standard operating procedures to guide the activities of the truckdrivers and limit the risk of cross-border transmission
- Inadequate preventive practices and measures by and for transnational truck drivers and their assistants, and the communities with which they engage during travel
- Weak coordination and information exchange between the neighbouring countries on containment measures for COVID-19 with no established mechanism for cross border surveillance
- Limited coordination between border agencies regarding the public health measures adopted for truck drivers, resulting in inefficient border processing times
- Inadequate information sharing between health surveillance data and immigration that can help in fast truck clearance procedures for drivers and crews
- Limited use of population mobility mapping together with surveillance data to identify potential hot spots and guide the investment of prevention and control activities along major transport corridors.
- Limited approaches developed for additional high-risk populations along transport corridors
- Non-harmonized management of cases detected in new arrivals at land borders
- A harmonized risk communication approach for cross-border truckers and other itinerant people in the region
- There is suboptimal regulation of the commercial truckdrivers industry in the region. This is compounded by lack of harmonized implementation of clearance procedures between states for drivers and crews – for example EAC guidelines versus national responses which include taking detailed information of truck drivers.

Strategic Objectives

The strategy aims to provide an upstream and sub-regional approach to complement existing COVID-19 preparedness and country response plans in a view of harmonizing approaches and enhance cross border coordination and efficiency. The strategy takes into consideration and intends to provide technical health guidance for the implementation of the ¹ ‘EAC administrative guideline to facilitate movement of goods and services during COVID-19’. In line with the WHO Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, the following are the objectives of the sub-regional strategy for cross-border prevention and control of COVID-19 along transport corridors in the ESA sub-region

1. **Sensitize and engage the transnational cargo companies** and communities in the sub-region for the prevention and control of COVID-19
2. **Prevent, detect, and timely respond to cases of COVID-19** among transnational truck drivers and their assistants through effective PoEs surveillance including lab testing, case management and risk communication
3. **Ensure effective cases tracking and contact tracing** among the transnational truck drivers and their assistants

Strategic Interventions

S01 – sensitization and engagement

- **Map transnational cargo business stakeholders** in the ESA sub-region
- **Develop and implement RCCE strategy and activities** contextualized to the sub-regional transnational cargo business, specifically targeting the transnational cargo businesses, communities at risk along transport corridors and other stakeholders
- **Establish a private public partnership with employers and trade union**

S02 – Harmonized PoE Surveillance

- **Develop and implement harmonized strategy for PoEs surveillance and testing, and transnational management of COVID-19** for truck drivers crossing national borders
- **Develop and implement harmonized sub-regional minimum IPC package of services at PoEs** and within country IPC interventions for transnational truck drivers
- **Develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation framework** for cross-border COVID-19 activities

S03 – Cases and contact tracing across borders

- **Develop and implement a sub-regional framework for information sharing** among ESA countries including for contact tracing of transnational truck drivers related cases
- **Rapid mapping of mobility trends of truck drivers in the sub-region** and the communities in which they interact during travel, and share information among ESA countries
- **Liaison with regional bodies to support cross border surveillance** in the context of COVID-19

¹ <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/covid-19/regional/3405-eac-administrative-guidelines-to-facilitate-movement-of-goods-and-services-during-covid-19-april-2020/file.html>

Implementation Plan

SO1: Sensitize and engage the transnational cargo communities in the sub-region for the prevention and control of COVID-19					
Strategic Interventions	Activities	Indicators	Targets	Partners(s)	Cost USD
<i>Develop and implement RCCE strategy and activities contextualized to the sub-regional transnational cargo business, specifically targeting the transnational cargo business stakeholders</i>	<i>Adapt/develop RCCE materials for truck drivers</i>			<i>UNICEF (lead), WHO, Africa CDC, IOM, EAC</i>	<i>12,000</i>
	<i>Establish private public partnership with transport company and trade union</i>	<i>Operational agreement in place</i>		<i>IOM (lead), Trademark (co-lead)</i>	
	<i>Sensitization of truck drivers and their supervisors on COVID-19 at points of origin and PoEs</i>	<i>Proportion of long-distance truck drivers sensitized on COVID-19</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>UNICEF – lead, IOM – co-lead, trademark, WHO</i>	<i>78,000</i>
	<i>Conduct RCCE targeting truck drivers and communities at cargo stop-over areas</i>			<i>IOM (lead), UNICEF, Trademark, WHO</i>	<i>195,000</i>
Subtotal					285,000
SO2: Detect, and adequately and timely respond to cases of COVID-19 among transnational truck drivers through effective PoEs surveillance, including lab testing					
Strategic Interventions	Activities	Indicators	Targets	Partner(s)	Cost
<i>Develop and implement a harmonized strategy for PoEs surveillance and testing, and transnational management of COVID-19 for truck drivers and assistants crossing national borders</i>	<i>Institute and harmonise testing strategy in line with WHO guidance and share results in a timely manner</i>	<i>Necessary SOP developed in agreement with MS</i>		<i>WHO (lead), Africa CDC, EAC</i>	<i>25,000</i>
	<i>Activate a mechanism (electronic) for real-time health information sharing with immigration officers</i>	<i>SOP on data management to be developed</i>	<i>As necessary</i>	<i>IOM (Lead), EAC, Trademark</i>	
	<i>Enhance testing capacity at strategic POEs including deployment of mobile laboratories and enhancement of specimen referral</i>	<i>Proportion of PoEs with testing capacities and effective specimen referral</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>IOM (lead), WHO, Africa CDC, EAC</i>	<i>350,000</i>
	<i>Activation of health screening and lab testing at points of departure/origin or exit</i>	<i>Proportion of member states carrying out testing for truck drivers at points of origin/exit</i>	<i>90%</i>	<i>IOM (lead), WHO, Africa CDC</i>	<i>240,000</i>
	<i>Strengthen health screening at strategic POEs; review the information passed from the FP of the country of departure, identify and confirm if there is any new development before continuing the trip</i>	<i>Proportion of PoEs conducting testing</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>IOM (lead), WHO, Trademark</i>	<i>150,000</i>
	<i>Identify/equip facilities for isolation and case management of positive Covid19 cases</i>	<i>Number of health facilities equipped to manage positive along the transport corridors</i>	<i>At least one per member state</i>	<i>Member state hosting the case</i>	

Develop and implement harmonized sub-regional minimum IPC package of services at PoEs	Support replenishment of supplies for the lab and IPC materials			Africa CDC (lead), IOM, WHO, EAC	450,000
	Support IPC activities at PoEs			UNICEF (lead)	300,000
Develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation framework for cross-border COVID-19 activities	Establish key performance indicators to monitor progress			WHO (lead), IOM, Africa CDC	
	Collect, analyse data and share information			WHO (Lead), IOM, Africa CDC, EAC	280,000
Subtotal					1,795,000
SO3: Ensure effective cases tracking and contact tracing among the transnational truck drivers					
Strategic Interventions	Activities	Indicators	Targets	Partner(s)	Cost
Develop and implement a sub-regional framework for information sharing among ESA countries including for contact tracing of transnational truck drivers related cases	Establish a sub-regional data base at PoEs to track all truck drivers and vehicles crossing points of entry	Proportion of member states with established electronic database	90%	Trademark (lead), IOM (lead), EAC	150,000
	Develop a protocol for ensuring information exchange and coordination among the member states and partners			EAC (lead), WHO, Africa CDC, IOM	
Rapid mapping of mobility trends of truck drivers in the sub-region and share information among ESA countries	Mapping of transnational cargo business stakeholders in the ESA sub-region			IOM (lead)	100,000
	Mapping the routes and social dynamics including stopover stations and communities in which truck drivers interact			IOM (lead),	150,000
	Conduct daily analysis of mobility trends			IOM (lead),	60,000
Strengthen cross border surveillance in the context of COVID-19	Conduct training of PoEs staff on COVID-19 surveillance			WHO (lead), Africa CDC, EAC,	50,000
	Develop and share guidelines for cross-border surveillance of COVID-19 in line with the IDSR			WHO (lead), Africa CDC, EAC,	50,000
Subtotal					560,000
GRAND TOTAL					2,640,000