WHO releases healthcare guidelines to tackle the pandemic

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To help countries maintain essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic

To help countries navigate through COVID-19 challenge, the World Health Organization (WHO) has updatedoperational planning guidelines in balancing the demands of responding directly to COVID-19 while maintaining essential health service delivery, and mitigating the risk of system collapse. This includes a set of targeted immediate actions that countries should consider at national, regional, and local level to reorganize and maintain access to high-quality essential health services for all.

Countries should identify essential services that will be prioritized in their efforts to maintain continuity of service delivery and make strategic shifts to ensure that increasingly limited resources provide maximum benefit for the population. They also need to comply with the highest standard in precautions, especially in hygiene practices, and the provision of adequate supplies including personal protective equipment This requires robust planning and coordinated actions between governments and health facilities and their managers.

Some examples of essential services include: routine vaccination; reproductive health services including care during pregnancy and childbirth; care of young infants and older adults; management of mental health conditions as well as noncommunicable diseases and infectious diseases like HIV, malaria and TB; critical inpatient therapies; management of emergency health conditions; auxiliary services like basic diagnostic imaging, laboratory services, and blood bank services, among others.

Well-organized and prepared health systems can continue to provide equitable access to essential service delivery throughout an emergency, limiting direct mortality and avoiding increased indirect mortality.

The guidelines stress the importance of keeping up-to-date information. This requires frequent transparent communications with the public, and strong community engagements so the public can maintain trust in the system to safely meet their essential needs and to control infection risk in health facilities. This will help ensure that people continue to seek care when appropriate, and adhere to public health advice.