

Transcript - COVID-19 Pandemic: Statement from Executive Director Peter Sands

As COVID-19 spreads around the world, the Global Fund's priority is to ensure continuity of life-saving programs to end HIV, TB and malaria – diseases that kill nearly 2.6 million people a year. We are also helping implementing countries as they respond to COVID-19. Quite apart from the direct impact of the new virus on countries, we anticipate it might have a significant negative impact on the fight against HIV, TB and malaria. It is worth recalling that when Ebola struck West Africa in 2014-2015, the incremental death toll from malaria as a result of the outbreak was greater than the number of lives lost from Ebola itself.

Two weeks ago, the Global Fund issued new guidance to enable countries to request use of Global Fund's financial resources to support their COVID-19 response, including redeploying underutilized assets, repurposing grant savings and, in exceptional cases, reprogramming from existing grants. This includes the development of response plans, laboratory testing, disease surveillance, infection control, and information campaigns. We are using a fast track decision-making process with a maximum response time of five working days. As of today, March 18, eight countries have received assistance from this new flexibility.

We are also working with countries to identify and mitigate the risks of COVID-19 that are derailing progress on HIV, TB and malaria. Whether through disruption to treatment and prevention programs, or disruption to procurement and supply chains.

We don't really know yet whether people infected with HIV, TB and malaria will prove more vulnerable to the new virus. The evidence thus far suggests that those with other health conditions are likely to be more severely affected. People living with HIV are immunocompromised, people with TB may have pre-existing respiratory dysfunction, parents with young children with fevers that might be caused by malaria might be scared to take them to clinics or hospitals. As with HIV, TB, and malaria, the risk is that COVID-19 falls most on the poorest, the most marginalized, and the most vulnerable.

We are encouraging countries to take prompt action in response to COVID-19, following WHO guidance. We are working closely with partners like the World Bank and GAVI, under WHO's overall leadership to coordinate support.

The Global Fund was created in response to the last big pandemic that struck humanity,

HIV and AIDS – a disease that has already caused 32 million deaths and still kills nearly a million a year. So, we know all too well what's at stake in terms of lives and threat to communities. But we also know what can be achieved if the world comes together to act decisively, harnessing the collective power of governments, civil society, communities, and the private sector. The next few months are going to be extremely testing. We will need once again that energy, the determination, the spirit of collaboration. The Global Fund will play its part.