Dear All,
Welcome to this first issue of USAID’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Burkina Faso. In this bi-monthly newsletter, you will learn how USAID and its implementing partners are helping to strengthen Burkina Faso’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This assistance is provided through many activities that support the different thematic committees established:

- diagnosis / laboratory;
- infection prevention and control;
- surveillance;
- coordination;
- risk communication and community engagement;
- case management;
- and logistics.

On March 9, 2020, Burkina Faso confirmed its first COVID-19 cases. The peak of the pandemic was recorded the week of 6-12 April 2020 with 151 cases reported. As of July 26, 2020, Burkina Faso has 1106 cases of COVID-19 including 389 women and 717 men, with 118 active cases, 935 recoveries and 53 reported deaths.

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INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Emergency response plan available

As part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Burkina Faso, USAID’s Medicines, Technologies and Pharmaceutical Services (MTaPS) project conducted rapid assessments of infection prevention and control (IPC) and management of biomedical waste in several health facilities. This activity targeted the following COVID-19 care sites: Yalgado Ouedraogo and Tengandogo University hospital centers and Princess Sarah clinic in Ouagadougou and Souro Sanou University hospital center in Bobo-Dioulasso. The assessment inventoried IPC and biomedical waste management practices through observation, assessed sorting and isolation centers, hand hygiene, maintenance of premises, and waste sorting, collection, transport, storage, treatment and disposal practices.

Following this evaluation, MTaPS collaborated with the health facilities involved structures to develop an emergency intervention plan. This plan aims to support these health structures, to ensure better IPC methods and biomedical waste management practices are followed.

As the disease progresses, USAID will work in close collaboration with other donors and partners to support the Government of Burkina Faso’s response efforts through the following activities:

- **Support the Ministry of Health to plan effectively for the reopening of land, air and rail borders**: this urgent action point requires close collaboration among all sectoral committees: Health, Civil Liberties and Community Response, Cooperation and Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Communication.

- **Reinforce risk communication and community engagement**: specific activities are required to address stigmatization of people with suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19. Different types of support materials will be produced and disseminated to counter stigma. The Prime Minister’s office will organize a national forum with cultural, religious and community leaders to engage them further in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Support for voluntary COVID-19 screening centers**: as the borders prepare to open, screening centers must be functional across all regions in Burkina Faso. Emphasis will be on ensuring sufficient screening and confirmation tests are available to meet the demand created by communication focused on encouraging attendance at voluntary screening centers.

- **Strengthening surveillance of respiratory infections**: as restrictions are lifted, it will be important to improve surveillance of respiratory infections to detect suspected COVID-19 cases rapidly.

- **Support the transfer to the routine system**: all stakeholders need a strong adaptive capacity to combat COVID-19. To this end, all partners need to support the Ministry of Health to integrate COVID-19 into routine care throughout the health system.
USAID, through the Breakthrough ACTION project, has strengthened the capacity of the COVID-19 National Pandemic Crisis Management Committee call center to research and identify COVID-19 cases in Burkina Faso. Using the ‘3535’ toll-free number, people can report suspicious cases, which allows the response committee to investigate and confirm the cases.

Three teams of 47 volunteers take eight-hour shifts to ensure continuous call center service. These operators, who receive at least 10,000 calls per day, are under great pressure to provide accurate information to scared and sometimes angry callers. During four interactive training sessions held on June 8 to 11, 2020, the operators analyzed their interpersonal communication practices in managing COVID-19 calls.

Through practical simulation exercises, the operators shared their daily experiences, reviewed their practices and agreed on immediate actions to manage telephone calls to support efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic more effectively. The operators also strengthened their knowledge about the incident management system of the Emergency Operations Center (CORUS). This included understanding the complementarity between all thematic committees and the crucial role they play in managing alerts.
USAID, through the MEASURE Evaluation project, strengthened the Ministry of Health capacity. This technical assistance allowed the Ministry of Health to respond to COVID-19, which includes better management of data and a coordinated response to reinforce information and communication technologies (ICT).

Since 2018, MEASURE Evaluation has supported the Ministry of Health to strengthen its event-based surveillance in the community by establishing an electronic One Health platform supported by Global Health Security Agenda funds. With USAID funding, MEASURE Evaluation was quickly able to adapt this platform to use in Burkina Faso's COVID-19 response.

Commonly used by ministries of health, environment and animal resources to monitor diseases with epidemic potential, the electronic One Health platform is being used to provide an effective response to COVID-19 through case monitoring, contact tracing, sharing laboratory results and routine surveillance.
With USAID funding, UNICEF mobilized and trained 500 young volunteers. Communities that understand how COVID-19 is transmitted, can greatly help stop the disease spread and end the pandemic in Burkina Faso. The mission of these young people is to raise awareness about hygiene and COVID-19 prevention measures in markets, stations, places of worship, and neighborhoods. This approach generates community commitment to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Community mobilization is essential to end the epidemic. The commitment of these volunteers and ability to build a bond of trust with local leaders, parents, young people and children in neighborhoods and communities will be a considerable added value to increase the population’s understanding of COVID-19 and how to protect oneself," said UNICEF Representative in Burkina Faso, Dr. Anne Vincent.

Selected with the involvement of the National Volunteering Program, the Ministry of Health, and municipal governments, these young volunteers will help reduce rumors and misinformation and strengthen the population’s confidence to address COVID-19. UNICEF with USAID support is pooling its efforts with other partners and operating within a national framework.

This approach has enabled Burkina Faso, through the ministry overseeing youth, to mobilize, train and equip 15,000 young volunteers to conduct awareness-raising and community engagement activities.
USAID, through Breakthrough ACTION, provided technical and financial support to the Ministry of Health to strengthen the skills of the media. The Ministry of Health held two COVID-19 information and training sessions for the media on June 4-5, 2020. Radio, TV, print and online press journalists improved their COVID-19 knowledge and discussed risk communication and community engagement.

Dr. Brice Bicaba, director of the Emergency Operations Center (CORUS) and coordinator of the Health Sector Committee believes the combination of efforts will enable Burkina Faso to overcome this pandemic. He noted these training sessions are timely because they equip journalists to fight against rumors and misinformation about COVID-19.

During the workshop, the journalists strengthened their knowledge about the global spread of COVID-19 and how it came to Burkina Faso. With the Communication and Press Department of the Ministry of Health (DCPM/Santé), journalists discussed how best to undertake COVID-19 communication activities. The rich discussions about risk communication and community engagement inspired the journalists to commit to fighting the pandemic in Burkina Faso using their journalistic resources.
USAID, through Health Policy Plus (HP+), conducted a situational analysis of the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) committee to identify current and planned activities and challenges. COVID-19 risk communication must constantly be renewed and adapted as the disease and the community’s concerns evolve.

Subsequently, the community engagement subcommittee held a consultation meeting and created a WhatsApp group to facilitate exchanges between members. During the discussions, members noted an increase in rumors and the non-compliance with barrier measures to prevent COVID-19.

The group discussed several rumors implying that COVID-19 only affects rich people; that the disease was invented to divert public funds for the political campaign; and that the disease can be easily cured with home remedies.

Another dangerous rumor claims that people are more likely to die when seeking care for COVID-19 at a health center, than emerge alive!

Government communication needs to be coordinated and to address these rumors quickly and coherently. Messages need to address the novelty of the disease and the dangers vulnerable populations face.

To remedy this, HP+ will mobilize young people, women and opinion leaders to share accurate information and raise awareness to improve their knowledge about the disease and the measures to prevent it.
GHSC-PSM supports the logistics committee

USAID through its Global Health Supply Chain Program - Procurement & Supply Management (GHSC-PSM) supported the COVID-19 response logistics committee of Burkina Faso from May 26 to June 4, to inventory the supplies in the Central Medical Stores (CAMEG). An audit firm (ACECA) supervised this inventory process. The teams arranged the stocks according to lot numbers, expiration date using good storage practices.

Then, the teams double-counted and recorded the data in CAMEG’s inventory management software (SAGE 1000) and at the logistics commission (DMS). The team established a record keeping process by the end of the activity.

"This inventory will enhance CAMEG’s skills to fight COVID-19 by ensuring good storage practices, handling and speed in transferring stocks to healthcare facilities and district health centers across the country," said Dr. Robert SAWADOGO, chairman of the logistics committee.

The Ministry of Health entrusted the management of physical stocks to CAMEG to optimize the availability of products in health facilities throughout the country.

Ten vehicles made available to strengthen the logistics capacity of the Emergency Operations Center (CORUS)

USAID’s Ending AIDS in West Africa (EAWA) project, funded by Game Changer Funds under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), has made ten vehicles available to the Emergency Operations Center (CORUS) for twenty days. The vehicles will be used to carry out CORUS activities including surveillance, monitoring quarantine measures, contact tracing, case management and transport of samples to the laboratory. The head of administrative and financial services at CORUS took possession of the ten vehicles on June 4, 2020 from EAWA’s focal point in Burkina Faso.