On 1 March, the Ministry of Health reported 45 new cases of COVID-19 in Mongolia, which brings the confirmed number of cases to 2,952; and represents a spike of almost four-fold in one month. Ulaanbaatar city remains the epicentre of infection with local transmission in 15 provinces.

The Government, however, has an ambitious plan to open the country’s borders from 1 May 2020, relying heavily on the positive impact of mass vaccination, which it is hoping will lead to a reduction in cases and control of the pandemic in Mongolia. In the first phase of the vaccination campaign, priority is being given to health workers and workers on the front line of the COVID-19 response.
FUNDING OVERVIEW

Funds that need to be mobilized for 2021: $2,000,000
Funding gap: $1,209,397.7

The Country Office estimates that a total of $2,000,000 is required in 2021 for COVID-19 response and relief efforts. To date, the CO has successfully mobilized a total of $790,602.3 from non-core resources for the COVID-19 response from the Swiss Development Cooperation’s supported project addressing gender-based violence (GBV), rollover funds from the Luxembourg Government and the Rio Tinto Mongolia LLC.

UNFPA Mongolia Country Office funding needs and resource mobilization by priority areas

GOVERNMENT, UN AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS’ RESPONSE

The Government has taken strong measures to strengthen the response to COVID-19 and address the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic in the country.

On 1 March, the State Emergency Commission (SEC) decided to remove restrictions on traffic movement from Ulaanbaatar to the rest of the country. The decision allowed citizens to leave the capital city on public transport and in their own vehicles. Simultaneously, the SEC established a working group to ensure the preparedness at border checkpoints.
On 2 March, the Speaker of the Mongolian Parliament, G. Zandanshatar, issued an ordinance to establish a working group headed by MP J. Chinburen and comprised of five other MPs with the mandate to oversee the implementation of the Law on Vaccination, within the framework of enforcing the Law on Prevention and Combatting the COVID-19 pandemic and reducing the negative socioeconomic impacts of the virus.

On 3 March, the Deputy Prime Minister and Chair of the State Emergency Commission (SEC), S. Amarsaikhan, issued Order No 22, in which the regulation for the work of the COVID-19 Emergency Operations Headquarters (EOH) was updated. The revised regulation stipulates that the Chairman of SEC is to be responsible for the overall policy and strategic management while the Head of the EOH is to be responsible for the daily operations of the operations team, comprised of representatives from NEMA, officials at decision-making levels from relevant governmental agencies, and the Mongolian Red Cross Society. In addition, a new working group is to be established made up of advisers, experts and vice ministers in charge of social and economic policy, health assistance and services to provide professional, methodological and policy support.

On 8 March 2021, the Government launched a MNT 2 trillion loan programme with the aim of supporting businesses and job retention; the employment support loan will carry an annual interest rate of 3 percent with a three-year term with the government guaranteeing 60 percent of the loan if necessary.

On 16 March, during his working visit to the Ministry of Health, the Deputy Prime Minister, S. Amarsaikhan, discussed an action plan for improving healthcare services in the current context where the daily number of new COVID-19 cases is increasing, with health experts. The Deputy PM tasked ministry officials with isolating COVID-19 patients with mild symptoms at home and providing treatment and regular medical advice and support via telephone. In light of increasing infection rates, preparations are also underway to increase the number of hospital beds and mobilize additional medical personnel.

On 25 March, the Cabinet convened for an irregular meeting and approved resolution No.78 to extend the period of heightened state of readiness for disaster protection nationwide until 30 April. The Cabinet discussed and adopted a budget for additional expenditure to respond to the increasing number of cases and the intensification of the immunization roll-out. In addition, a resolution on measures to be taken at border crossing points was amended and extended by one month. According to the resolution, freight transportation will be able cross through 14 border points until 1 May, while passenger movement will remain restricted. Only with the permission of SEC can passengers enter through the country’s borders.
On 26 March, the SEC resolved to restrict traffic movement from Ulaanbaatar to the rest of the country for 14 days. Only essential goods such as food, fuel, fodder, medicines and medical supplies, and mining products were allowed to be transported. A decision was also made to move certain provinces with an increasing number of COVID-19 cases, as well as those that are currently high-risk, into the Red Level - Level 4 from 6 am on 28 March to 6 am on 11 April.

On 31 March, the Cabinet had a regular meeting to review the recommendation of the SEC to restrict the operations of some businesses from 3 to 18 April 2021, to control the spread of COVID-19 in Ulaanbaatar city. These measures included the closure of businesses where people gather, such as restaurants - permitting food delivery only - cinemas, theatres, sanatoriums and training centres; and limiting the opening hours of big markets, shops and supermarkets, hair and beauty salons. At the same meeting, the Cabinet approved a total of MNT 2.8 billion as incentive pay for 2,230 healthcare workers and 1,100 resident doctors, who have been working on the frontline to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. A one-time incentive payment of MNT 1 million will be made to all doctors, nurses and medical employees responding to COVID-19 and each resident doctor will receive MNT 500,000.

**COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME**

Total number of people vaccinated as of 31 March 2021 - 300,366.
On 18 March, UNFPA CO virtually handed over 85 primary health care packages, funded by the Government of Luxembourg, to Bayan-Ulgii province Health Department. Community health care workers in Bayan-Ulgii province were provided with an outreach service package so they can provide home visits to pregnant and postpartum women, newborns and persons with chronic illnesses. This will ensure women do not visit crowded hospitals for prenatal check-ups, mitigating the risks of COVID-19 infection. The packages include essential equipment such as portable weight scales, a device to measure oxygen saturation, a device to measure the fetal heart rate, and rapid tests for glucose, cholesterol and urinary protein.

On 17 March, the Minister for Health approved by order No A/133 a temporary guideline on the provision of antenatal care during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guideline was developed with the technical support of the UNFPA CO, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Mongolian Federation of Obstetrician and Gynecologists, within the framework of the Rio Tinto Mongolia LLC-supported project “Building the Capacity for COVID-19 Diagnosis and Service Delivery for the Most Vulnerable amidst Pandemic in Mongolia”. The project is implemented in partnership with the UNFPA CO and Oyu Tolgoi LLC. The policy document provides detailed guidelines on the provision of four out of the eight required prenatal care visits through telemedicine mode. The guideline can be downloaded from https://mongolia.unfpa.org/en/node/57768.
On 25 March, the CO handed over a video conferencing system to the National Center for Maternal and Child Health and the School of Nursing for their skill development laboratories. These laboratories train midwives and healthcare professionals who work in provincial hospitals; the video conferencing system will be used for online training. The systems were purchased through the third phase of the telemedicine project, supported by the Government of Luxembourg.

Supporting youth development and youth engagement

UNFPA, together with UNESCO and Advocates for Youth, continues to support efforts to promote age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health by expanding access – and improving the quality of – information. A total of 28 factual and age-relevant videos for children and adolescents up to the age of 14 years of age have been developed. These videos will be integrated into the current e-learning platform of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) to support online learning.

A “private talks’ series on puberty, sexual health, menstrual hygiene, and relationships have been developed and published through the teen web portal Yolo. mn – a popular news platform for adolescents and youth in Mongolia. The private talks were viewed by over 26,125 young people in March.

Addressing gender-based violence

Between 5 and 31 March 2021, UNFPA and the Government of Mongolia, in collaboration with NGOs and other UN agencies, celebrated International Women’s Day (IWD) with the theme “#БИ ...БАЙНА” (“Choose to Challenge”) to encourage people to challenge harmful gender stereotypes that prevent women and girls from having equal opportunities and perpetuate gender-based violence (GBV), while also celebrating women in leadership, especially in the context of the COVID-19 response and recovery in Mongolia.

As part of this campaign, a number of activities were initiated and organized in all 21 provinces and nine districts of Ulaanbaatar with the objectives of: raising public awareness about the issues that women face and to celebrate the achievements of the many women in leadership on International Women’s Day; and to engage men and boys as champions of ending GBV efforts on the occasion of Mongolian Military Day. Due to COVID-19, the activities primarily leveraged social media and other online platforms, while communication materials were strategically placed in communities and in public places that people are still able to access during the lockdown, including apartments, ger district compounds, supermarkets, pharmacies, and petrol stations.
Coordination

- Participating in inter-agency coordination mechanisms.
- Leading inter-agency GBV coordination mechanisms.
- UNFPA co-chairs the UN PSEA network with the RC.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY

Bi...байна” Би жөндөрүүн хөвөөмөл ойлголтуу эсэр, MNT live broadcasting interview with Kaori Ishikawa, Head of Office, UNFPA Mongolia, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1081741158976560&ref=watch_permalink


Minister for Education L.ENKHAMGALAN meets with Kaori Ishikawa, Head of Office, UNFPA Mongolia: Л.Энх-Амгалан: Сүргүүлөө, цацэрлээг, дотоо байрын нүүрэн жорлонг сүлээг ажил эхэлсэн (ikon.mn)

UN Joint press release for March 8 Internation Women’s Day: НҮБ. Монгол Улсад КОВИД-19 цар тахлын эсэрээ тэмцлийн тэргүүн эгнэнд эмгээтэйчүүд манлайж байна (ikon.mn)

UNFPA GBV project - Handover of personal protective equipment: Гэмт хэрэгсээ уриджилан сэргийлээж ажлыг зохицуулах зөвлөл - Posts | Facebook

85 bagh doctors of Bayan-Ulgii aimag are provided with healthcare kits: 85 багийн эмчид эрүүл мэндийн тусламж үйлчилгээний багц олголоо (montsame.mn)

Minister of foreign affair B.Battsetseg meets with Kaori Ishikawa, Head of Office, UNFPA Mongolia: НҮБ-ын Хүн амын сан хүчирхийллийн эсэрт ажлаа үргэлжлүүлэнэ (montsame.mn)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
Kaori Ishikawa, Head of UNFPA Mongolia Country Office Email: kishikawa@unfpa.org
Oyunaa Lkhagvasuren, COVID-19 Coordinator Email: olkhagvasuren@unfpa.org

FOR UPDATES OF COVID-19 IN MONGOLIA, PLEASE VISIT:
The State Emergency Committee’s decision https://nema.gov.mn/c/resolution