Over the last two months, Mongolia commenced recovery from the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths began to decline as the vaccination coverage increased, including booster shots.

The number of patients under critical care decreased from 300 by 1 November to 63 by 12 December 2021. At the beginning of December, the daily newly detected cases ranged between 136-268, with two to three deaths per day on average. This is the lowest daily number of COVID-19 cases recorded in Mongolia since 17 March 2021.

As of 12 December, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Mongolia stood at 385,353, and the country’s COVID-19 death toll reached 1,960. During the reporting period, six cases were imported and confirmed as the Delta variant. The current nationwide regime of heightened readiness, the Orange Level of regulations, will expire on 31 December 2021.
VACCINATION:

The government is taking all necessary actions to increase the rate of vaccination by mobilizing mobile clinics, family group practitioners, and private clinics. As of 6 December, the coverage of the first dose of COVID-19 vaccination reached 69.4 percent (2,258,443), second dose 66.2 percent (2,146,589), and third or booster dose of COVID-19 vaccination reached 23 percent (542,480) of the total population.

MATERNAL HEALTH:

Sixty-five maternal deaths were registered in Mongolia during the reporting period, 45 of which were caused by COVID-19 related complications. In support of a national owned and led response to further reducing maternal mortality, UNFPA organized a joint mission to one province where a high maternal mortality rate was reported, with the Parliament Standing Committee on Social Protection to provide technical support and assess the COVID-19 implication on sexual and reproductive health service delivery.

POLICY RESPONSES:

Since the COVID-19 situation is getting better, the Ministry of Health introduced several changes in policy regulation that includes:

1. A new guideline on re-allocation of hospital beds to ensure the continuation of general health care services, including maternity care, has been introduced. Starting from 15 November 2021, all major tertiary level hospitals will not provide COVID-19 care.
2. The weekly press conference organized by the Ministry of Health every Friday has shifted to biweekly to provide detailed information on the status of the Coronavirus infection.
3. The post-COVID-19 care is now available at government hospitals, covered by health insurance.
4. Indoor mask-wearing is mandatory.

MEASUREMENTS RELATED TO THE OMICRON VARIANT:

1. Due to the high spread of the Omicron variant in other countries, Mongolia introduced a 10-day mandatory quarantine for travellers from countries where the Omicron variant is registered. For others, rapid and PCR tests are required regardless of negative PCR test result within the previous 72 hours.
2. For in-country travels, vaccine certification and negative SARC-Cov antigen test result are required.
3. The government has restricted the New Year’s celebration for all state organizations.
The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is an international campaign held every year from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day) since 1991 with the purpose of raising awareness about and engaging the public to end GBV and other harmful practices against women and girls. This year, the global community is celebrating its 30th year anniversary. The 16 Days Campaign was first held in Mongolia in 1997 by the National Center Against Violence, but over the years, UNFPA, government agencies, and other civil society organizations also joined the initiative to further amp up the effort to end GBV in the country.

In Mongolia, the campaign was organized jointly by UNFPA, government agencies, UN agencies, development partners, NGOs, and CSOs around the theme “GBV matters to everyone”. This theme was chosen to counteract the culture of silence associated with GBV and the belief that GBV is a women’s issue or a private matter. This theme also provided an opportunity to frame GBV as a community issue that requires all individuals to work together to put an end to GBV, because by not calling out and standing against GBV in any and all forms, even in the most minor of occurrences, the general public is perceived to be silently consenting to the violence and to the perpetuation of harmful gender norms.

An extensive social media campaign was rolled out by all stakeholders, which included videos, podcasts, and other visual content that showed the way GBV manifests itself in everyday life, how individuals can take action in their daily life, and called on individuals to stand up against GBV. UNFPA Mongolia created an online quiz to gauge individual beliefs about sexism and gender norms by presenting problematic situations. The social media campaign received strong engagement, reaching hundreds of thousands of people across Mongolia.

To kick off the campaign, the National Committee on Gender Equality organized a launch ceremony on 25 November 2021, where key representatives from UNFPA and UNRCO participated as speakers, together with representatives from the government and donor agencies, including the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The conference Our Voices, organized by the National Center Against Violence on 2 December, put forward the voices of GBV survivors. The campaign ended with the National Forum on Strengthening Multisectoral Response to GBV, organized by the Coordination Council for Crime Prevention, where UNFPA provided opening remarks.
On top of the activities mentioned above, the following were (co-)organized by UNFPA:

**SPEAKER SERIES**

UNFPA and the EU Delegation in Mongolia co-hosted an online Speaker Series that touched on the reality of GBV in the country, as well as how people could contribute to the fight to end all forms of GBV given their situation and context. The Speaker Series consisted of five events, and kicked off with a plenary high-level event, followed by five smaller events that catered to specific stakeholder groups.

The plenary event was held on 29 November at Blue Sky Tower in Ulaanbaatar. Opening remarks were given by Mr. Tapan Mishra, UN Resident Coordinator in Mongolia, and H.E. Axelle Nicaise, Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Union to Mongolia.

A presentation on the GBV situation in Mongolia and its impacts on individuals and the community was given by Ms. Kai Jimenez, GBV Officer at UNFPA, and followed by a panel discussion on strategies and good practices in combating GBV in Mongolia at the personal, organizational, and national levels.

Panelists included H.E G. Ganbayar, Vice Minister for Education and Science, Ms. Elaine Conkievich, UNDP Representative, Ms. Melissa Shanjengange, Oyu Tolgoi General Manager for People and Organizations, and Ms. D. Enkhjargal, MONFEMNET Coordinator, and was moderated by Ms. Lorna Rolls, UNFPA Head of Office a.i. The UN Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences Reem Alsalem also attended and delivered a statement during the event.

The Speaker Series continued through December with four targeted events for the LGBTQI community, men and fathers, young professionals, and university students. All events were live broadcasted on Facebook and reached over 15'000 views.
VISIT OF THE UN SPECIAL RAPPOPORTEUR FOR VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

At the invitation of the Government of Mongolia, Ms. Reem Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences commenced her mission to Mongolia from 29 November to 8 December 2021. The Special Rapporteur’s mission was to review Mongolia’s implementation of international commitments and legal frameworks established to prevent and eliminate violence against women, as well as examine the response to specific manifestations of violence against women such as trafficking of women and girls, violence against refugee and migrant women, and girls at risk of statelessness and femicide. On behalf of the Mongolia UNCT and with the support of the UN RCO and UNDP, UNFPA in close collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led the in-country coordination for the Special Rapporteur’s mission. The Special Rapporteur met with Members of Parliament, Cabinet, Supreme Court, independent state institutions, international organizations, donors, financial institutions, CSOs, and victims of violence to better understand the situation of women’s rights in Mongolia. She presented preliminary findings to Government and the media prior to her departure on 8 December. For UNFPA, it was a tremendous opportunity and privilege to support the Special Rapporteur’s mission.

HIGH-LEVEL ADVOCACY FIELD MISSION ORGANIZED IN UMNUGOBI AIMAG

UNFPA, in collaboration with the Government of Mongolia, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the European Union, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women organized a high-level advocacy field mission to Umnugobi province from 30 November to 3 December 2021.

The field mission took place during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, held from International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November through Human Rights Day on 10 December. This mission provides an additional opportunity to reiterate the commitment of UNFPA and development partners in the fight against all forms of violence nationwide. Activities specifically designed for this campaign was also be carried out in Umnugobi province during the mission, such as a training on Bystander to Action Approach, to give the tools to each individual to intervene and stand up against violence should they witness it, as well as a training on Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation to the local authorities.
BYSTANDER TO ACTION TRAINING

As part of the campaign, UNFPA also developed a training on the Bystander to Action Approach based on international best practices, aiming at providing each individual the tools to know when and how to intervene should they witness a problematic situation. During the training, participants were taught 1) How to recognize abusive behavior and problematic situations and determine if they can/want to intervene; 2) Tools to intervene in a safe and confident way, without causing any harm; 3) Tips for recovering from witnessing problematic situations.

Training sessions were conducted throughout the campaign to over 300 people, including for representatives of the UN Gender Theme Group and development partners involved in the 16 Days Campaign, UNFPA implementing partners, OSSCs and shelter staff, men, secondary school students, and TVET students. Participants found the material user-friendly, practical, substantive and they felt empowered after the session.

TRAINING ON PREVENTION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA)

To reiterate the UN's commitment to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), a training was conducted with the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Mongolia on 30 November 2020. The training was facilitated by the Asia-Pacific Regional Inter-Agency PSEA Coordinator. As the leaders of their respective agencies, UNCT must be fully informed on PSEA concepts, strategies, and policies so that they may be engaged and committed to advocating for and addressing this important issue within their organizations, among their partners, and collectively as UN Mongolia. This event kicked off the capacity-building interventions for UN Mongolia's staff, non-staff personnel, partners, and vendors.
In September 2021, the Ministry of Health conducted a competency-based family planning training in Eastern provinces, with the technical and financial support of UNFPA. The training used the training modules designed for midwives working in primary health care. This hands-on training on counseling, insertion, and removal of long-acting reversible contraceptives, such as IUDs and implants, was highly appreciated by trainees.

In November, similar trainings were carried out for the midwives working at the National Center for Maternal and Child Health and Ulaanbaatar district levels. The training was designed to empower and build the capacity of midwives and create midwife-led family planning services nationwide.

In November, 44 midwives from Ulaanbaatar have attended the training. The training will continue involving midwives from maternity homes and district health centers in December. The pre- and post-training test results showed that the knowledge and skills of participants increased from 56% to 88%.
Since the approval of the WHO guidelines “Beyond the Numbers: Reviewing maternal deaths and complications to make pregnancy safer” in 2004, Mongolia adopted the strategy to review maternal deaths every four years.

In 2020, with UNFPA support, the National Center for Maternal and Child Health (NCMCH) experts reviewed maternal deaths that occurred in Mongolia from 2016-2019. Due to increasing suicide rate among pregnant and postpartum women, researchers also reviewed maternal deaths resulted from incidental causes during this period. The used technique is known as Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths, an approach recommended by “Beyond the Numbers”.

The results were thoroughly discussed by the professional community and the Advisory Board to the Ministry of Health on Obstetrics and Gynecology previously. The findings provide valuable insights into the causes of maternal deaths, and together with the previous reviews, show useful information for policy and clinical management.

Based on the key findings of the study, factsheets were developed for decision makers. The Parliament Standing Committee on Social Policy organized a consultative meeting to share and discuss the findings of the study and consider strategic evidence-based responses.

The meeting was chaired by Chair of Standing Committee MP Ms. Oyunchimeg, and was attended several MPs who are members of the Committee. The meeting was attended by Dr. Enkhbold, Minister of Health, department heads of the Ministry of Health, directors of the National Center for Maternal and Child Health (NCMCH) and maternity hospitals, academia and NGOs. The NCMCH presented the challenges in maternal and child health posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the tripling of the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) compared to pre-COVID-19 situation.

Ms. Lorna Rolls, UNFPA Head of Office a.i. drew attention to the adverse impact of COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and child health, and she encouraged the meeting to strengthen the resilience of health system with well-equipped and trained health service providers to ensure the continuity of essential life-saving services for mothers and newborn babies. She highlighted the substantial link between poor maternal mortality outcomes and gender-based violence. The study highlight pregnant women are lacking support from their partners, family and community. Ms. Rolls encouraged greater public awareness and political consciousness around gender equality, gender-based violence and its life threatening implications on maternal health outcomes. She highlighted the value in reviewing closely incidental maternal deaths, as they are often not captured, analyzed and addressed accordingly. The increasing maternal suicide cases, including those among adolescent girls, clearly show the need for increased availability and access to mental health services in addition to sexual and reproductive health services for women, particularly young girls.

The participating MPs and the Health Minister and his senior officials expressed strong commitment for reducing preventable maternal deaths and pledged to establish a Working Group for Maternal and Child Health under the Standing Committee. This is critical to the important work to bring to zero preventable maternal deaths.
The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted maternal health and caused the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) increase to 96 per 100,000 live births as of October 2021. This year, the MMR in Arkhangai province is 208.8 per 100,000 live birth as of October 2021, which is more than two times higher than the national level. One out of four maternal deaths caused by COVID-19. Lessons learned from each death helped to identify the systemic errors and provides insights on what can be done to eliminate preventable maternal deaths.

In response, the Parliament Standing Committee on Social Policy commissioned a mission to visit the Arkhangai province jointly with the Ministry of Health and UNFPA to review the causes of maternal deaths, and provide training on clinical movement of pregnant and postpartum women with COVID-19, and newborns. The trainers were specialists from the Mongolian National University of Medical Sciences and the National Center for Maternal and Child Health (NCMCH).

The training workshop was opened by MP Chinburen, Chair of the Parliamentary Lobby Group for People's Health, and three MPs elected from Arkhangai province. The topics covered by the training specifically addressed the causes of maternal deaths that occurred in the province. The discussion revealed the need for on-the-job training on Emergency Obstetric Care for Arkhangai obstetricians and midwives, who are relatively young and inexperienced. A three-day training by NCMCH experts in the province is planned for December 2021.
With the funding support from UNFPA, the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (NHRC) developed four short videos based on the study findings on the right to access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of women and girls in different aspects related to the attitude of employers and health care providers.

The studies covered the status of the fulfillment of the rights of various marginalized population groups such as herders, women and girls with disabilities, and those who are working in remote mining areas. The findings of the studies were reflected in the 18th and 19th reports on the Status of Human Rights, which were discussed by Parliament in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

Following the high-level dissemination of the findings of the “Why did mother die?” study at the Parliament level, the National Center for Maternal and Child Health has organized a public discussion “Social Factors Influencing Maternal Health”. The discussion is intended to bring the attention of the health administrators, CSOs, mass media, and the general public to issues such as lack of partner, family, or community support to pregnant and nursing women, and, in some cases, even physical violence, which have been shown to contribute to poor maternal outcomes.

The study also highlights the need to educate women and families on the importance of antenatal care and recognizing the danger signs during pregnancy, or in the postpartum period, which indicates the need to seek medical care immediately.
The National Center for Lifelong Education (NCLE), with funding support from UNJP, has conducted a series of trainings for herders using the modules on SRH, GBV prevention and soft life-skills in Zavkhan province, involving some 1,000 herders in their communities.

Another important event was the launch of the Sub-Programme on Improving Life Skills and Social Protection of Herders, organized by the NCLE with support from ILO and UNFPA, followed by the training of trainers from all 21 provinces, who will conduct a joint online training programme for herders. The training is composed of six modules for capacity building of herder’s cooperatives led by ILO and three modules supported by UNFPA on SRHR, GBV prevention and soft skills.
Emergency obstetric care demonstration training

The last phase of the Telemedicine Project, supported by the Government of Luxembourg introduced simulation-based training in maternal and newborn health and set up two simulation laboratories, one at the National Center for Maternal and Child Health (NCMCH), and another at the School of Nursing of the Mongolian National University of Medical Sciences. Moreover, the project established obstetrics emergency drilling units in all 21 provincial hospitals.

There is strong evidence that skilled emergency care in response to obstetric complications such as hemorrhage, sepsis, hypertensive disorders, prolonged or obstructed labor, and uterine rupture is critical in the reduction of maternal mortality. Moreover, team management in obstetric emergencies significantly improves maternal and newborn outcomes.

With technical and financial support from UNFPA, the expert team at NCMCH developed five modules of emergency obstetric drills for clinical scenarios, such as postpartum hemorrhage, shoulder dystocia, pregnancy-induced hypertension, breech delivery, and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation.

Continued competency-based trainings of midwives on LARC

In partnership with the National Center for Maternal and Child Health, UNFPA has continued its support of the long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) training for midwives.

As planned in 2021, the goal is to train 175 midwives working at different health care settings to provide quality family planning services, as indicated in their new job description.

To date, 105 midwives and freshly graduated gynecologists were trained from selected geographic sites, including Eastern provinces (35) and, Uvs province (40), Ulaanbaatar districts such as Chingeltei (8) and Bayangol (5), and the National Center for Maternal and Child Health (18).
UNFPA attended the Donor Meeting 2021 conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) on 25 November. The UNFPA Mongolia Country Office presented UNFPA’s initiatives and projects implemented with MoES. The ministry introduced its five-year strategy to development partners and discussed potential collaboration to strengthen the education sector in Mongolia. At the meeting, UNFPA encouraged the strengthening of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Mongolia through the institutionalization of the health education programme as a stand-alone subject.

Second phase of UN Joint Integrated Support Programme

An individual consultant was hired by the UNFPA Mongolia Country Office and developed a proposal for the second phase of the Integrated Support Programme on Health, incorporating the "Nutgiin Khishig 2021-2024" programme of Umnugobi province. Furthermore, UNFPA and UNICEF consulted with local stakeholders to determine the logical framework of the second phase of the Integrated Support Programme.
Pre-departure Programme launched

The UNFPA Mongolia Country Office has developed and launched the "Pre-departure Programme in Umnugobi province on 16 November. The Pre-departure Programme aims to provide adolescents graduating from secondary school with better preparations for coping with a new environment when they enroll and attend university. The programme focuses on delivering comprehensive guidance on sexual and reproductive health services, social support services for adolescents, and integrating them with other programmes.

Through the programme, participants are expected to become better prepared physically and mentally for their new journey in life and settlement in urban areas by strengthening their coping skills, independence, knowledge, and awareness in protecting themselves from unintended developments.

Capacity building of health service providers

Regional training on “Eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B virus and syphilis” and “Clinical diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19” have been successfully organized in the province. A series of capacity-building training workshops were carried out in Gurvantes, Tsogttsetsii, and Khanbogd soums to increase the quality and accessibility of adolescents and youth-friendly health services through Adolescent Cabinets in Umnugobi. Attendees included public health officers of soum hospitals, adolescent doctors, soum and school social workers, health education teachers, school doctors, Youth Development Center officers, and peer educators.

Regional Diagnostic Treatment Center anesthesiologist Dr. Oyunsuvd is attending a capacity-building training for an obstetric intensive care specialist for three months at the National Center for Maternal and Child Health (NCMCH).
Psychological counselling and psychological services for youth, single parents and children

With support from the National Center for Mental Health, Regional Diagnostic Treatment Center Psychology Cabinet organized a two-day training for 25 target group children and their family members.

The training aimed to teach parents the basics of understanding the psychology of children with disabilities and improving their communication skills. It also focused on improving the attitude of children with special needs to manage their psychology properly, receive advice when necessary, support their correct actions, prohibit dangerous actions to themselves and others, and develop the mentality to tolerate these prohibitions.

In addition, the training drew the attention of relevant organizations concerned with the issues of these children and promoted inter-sectoral cooperation.

Strengthening the capacity of Y-Peer trainers and network in Umnugovi province

The “Y-PEER LISTENING” campaign was organized among Y-PEER clubs in Dalanzadgad soum of Umnugobi province. The activity aimed to activate and strengthen their activities to increase the knowledge and skills of peer educators and school doctors through them to educate adolescents and young people about sexual and reproductive health, STIs, family planning, and teach youth how to protect themselves from risks.

“Youth Participation and the Future of the Gobi” conference held

In the framework of the Integrated Support Programme for Womens’ and Youth Health in Umnugovi province (2018-2021), the Umnugovi province Youth Development Sub-Council under the Umnugovi Governor and the province's Family, Child, and Youth Development Department organized a conference on “Youth Participation and the Future of the Gobi” on 18 December 2021.

The conference was attended by 100 young people from 15 soums of the province to discuss development issues concerning youth in Gobi, exchanged and conveyed their views to Umnugobi province Governor R. Seddorj and other relevant officials.
“UN in UM” photo exhibition

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Mongolia joining the United Nations, the Umnugobi Governor’s Office launched the “UN in UM” photo exhibition to mark the meaningful collaboration with UN organizations and key achievements and activities implemented through the Integrated Support Programme in the last four years.

Support training and advocacy activities for developing family members’ behavior and anger management skills

In collaboration with National Center for Mental Health, the Psychology Cabinet in Regional Diagnostic Treatment Center organized a three-day training on managing stress, depression, anxiety and anger during an epidemic and after treatment, and how to develop stress management skills and how to deal with anger. About 150 people, including TVET dormitory students, social workers, school teachers, doctors, and civil servants, attended the training.

3rd annual meeting of provincial Education Managers in Umnugobi province

The annual provincial Education Managers’ Meeting was held on 18 November in Dalanzadgad. During this meeting, the local education department introduced the implementation of the project to support extracurricular activities at secondary schools and provided information to stakeholders at the management level.
UNFPA Mongolia is able to carry out its mandate thanks to the tireless dedication and hard work of its staff. In this section, we feature the wonderful people that make up UNFPA Mongolia, and the vision they bring to the country office.

In this issue, we interviewed Lorna Rolls, UNFPA Pacific Assistant Representative and Head of Office a.i. at UNFPA Mongolia, who provided invaluable support in UNFPA’s strategic engagement in the new UNSDCF and rolling out the office-wide approach to shaping of the new Country Programme, while making significant contributions to UNFPA Mongolia’s strategic engagement, management and leadership.

"The timeless vision and promise of the ICPD mandate is my first love with UNFPA.”

How would you describe UNFPA Mongolia in 3 words?

Driven, capable, ingenious.

In your opinion, why is UNFPA’s existence important?

UNFPA in Mongolia has a strategic leadership role in promoting universal access to SRHR to truly transform the lives of women and girls, adolescents and young people. UNFPA is a game changer in safeguarding bodily autonomy and agency, as well as amplifying the voice of women and girls, adolescents and young people, ensuring their full and equal participation and leadership in sustainable development that is meaningful and relevant to them.
What made you join UNFPA?

The timeless vision and promise of the ICPD mandate is my first love with UNFPA.

Can you share with us a great memory you have from your time at UNFPA Mongolia?

Every moment in Mongolia was spectacular from strategic engagement, management and leadership to learning to walk on snow. The most memorable are the times with the country office staff, the collective ownership and shaping of a future dream through Country Programme 7, mentoring support to staff, and the collective learning sessions, particularly the Communication Session was just hilarious and ground breaking in many ways.
FOR UPDATES ON COVID-19 IN MONGOLIA, PLEASE VISIT:

Ministry of Health daily report on COVID-19 in Mongolia:


The State Emergency Committee’s decisions:


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