

Wits RHI's COVID-19 Initiatives/Projects



Since the declaration of the pandemic, Wits RHI quickly responded to a clarion call to contribute towards various attempts to launch defences against the spread of COVID-19. The institute actively participated in studies and activities aimed at amongst other things, determining effective and safe COVID-19 treatments, prevention, and better understanding COVID-19 transmission. These studies and activities were facilitated at local, national, and international level through partnerships with other health organisations and countries.

Wits RHI's founder, Prof. Helen Rees is internationally renowned for her research and policy work in vaccines, HIV, and reproductive health. She chairs the principal vaccine advisory group to the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Africa, known as the African Regional Immunization Technical Advisory Group (RITAG). She is a member of the board of Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) and she chairs GAVI's Programme and Policy Committee. She serves on the board of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness (CEPI) and chairs its Scientific Advisory Committee.

Prof. Helen Rees is a member of the Governance Committee in the COVID-19 Clinical Research Coalition, a member of the WHO International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee on COVID-19, as well as of the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on the COVID-19 Vaccine. Prof. Helen Rees is appointed to various South African ministerial committees that inform the Minister of Health on COVID-19. She also chairs the WHO IHR Emergency Committee on Polio and Co-chairs the SAGE Ebola Vaccine Committee. She is Chair of the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority.

Under the leadership of Prof. Helen Rees, Wits RHI has participated in ground-breaking COVID-19 studies and intervention. The institute's directors are currently involved in a total of 15 COVID-19 studies and initiatives. Prof. Helen Rees is the Co-Chair of the South African arm of the Solidarity trial. The Solidarity trial is a WHO coordinated trial that will generate high quality evidence on COVID-19 treatment options. Prof. Helen Rees is also the International Coordinator for the global CROWN Coronation study. This study is aimed at looking at strategies to protect healthcare workers against the COVID-19 infection.

Wits RHI's COVID-19 projects are being spearheaded by our directors who are currently engaged in several COVID-19 studies. These are;

The Solidarity Trial

A global public health emergency trial of different treatments in severely ill COVID-19 patients receiving their hospitals' standard of care. This study aims to find out whether any of the COVID-19 treatments are effective. *(Prof. Helen Rees National Co-PI; Dr Thesla Palanee: National Coordinator)*

CROWN Coronation: COVID-19 Research Outcomes Worldwide Network for CORONAvirus prevention

The main aim of the trial is to see whether Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine can prevent or reduce the severity of COVID-19 in healthcare workers. *(Prof. Sinead Delany-Moretlwe South African Co-PI, Prof. Helen Rees Global Co-PI)*

The South African Ox1Cov-19 Vaccine VIDA-Trial

A randomized placebo-controlled study to determine the safety, immunogenicity, and efficacy of a new SARS-CoV-2 vaccine called ChAdOx1 nCoV-19. *(Prof. Lee Fairlie PI)*

The Pregnancy Surveillance Study

The Pregnancy Surveillance Study aims to evaluate the impact of SARS-CoV-2 in pregnancy and household contacts of pregnant women, since there is insufficient research on this population. *(Prof. Lee Fairlie PI)*

UNITY Healthcare Worker Registry

The UNITY Healthcare Worker Registry assess the association of potential prophylactic treatments with reduced risk of COVID-19 (or SARSCoV-2 infection) in healthcare workers caring for COVID-19 patients. *(Prof. Sinead Delany-Moretlwe PI)*

The EDCTP-COREP COVID-19 Household Cluster Investigation

This study aims to determine the epidemiological parameters of COVID-19 through a household transmission study in a rural area of South Africa. *(Dr Gloria Maimela PI)*

National testing and contact tracing across our PEPFAR-funded programmes: The Wits RHI PEPFAR COVID-19 Response committee

The committee serves as a nerve centre to coordinate the internal Wits RHI COVID-19 response and to leverage resources and best practices between the programmes. This committee response is guided by the Wits RHI Steering committee, PEPFAR and its agencies (USAID, CDC, UNITAID, and ELMA). *(Dr Gloria Maimela PI and Prof. Saiqa Mullick PI)*

The National WhatsApp messaging and symptom surveillance programme: COVID-19 HealthCheck joint initiative

The COVID-19 Digital Risk Assessment and Mapping Tool known as HealthCheck, complements national screening efforts by allowing users to self-report symptoms and details such as age and location, for early detection, mapping, and linkage of those reporting symptoms to testing services. *(Prof. Saiqa Mullick, Co-PI)*

Novovax

The purpose of this study is 2-fold: 1) to evaluate the efficacy, safety, and immunogenicity of SARS-CoV-2 rS with Matrix-M1 adjuvant in serologically naïve (to SARS-CoV-2) healthy human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)-negative adult subjects (Cohort 1 – HIV-negative) and 2) to evaluate the safety and immunogenicity of SARS-CoV-2 rS with Matrix-M1 adjuvant in serologically naïve (to SARS-CoV-2) medically stable HIV-positive adult subjects (Cohort 2 – HIV-positive). *(Prof. Lee Fairlie PI)*

ENSEMBLE

ENSEMBLE's objective is to demonstrate the efficacy of AD26.COVS.2 in the prevention of molecularly confirmed moderate to severe/critical COVID-19, as compared to Placebo, in SARS-CoV-2 Seronegative adults. *(Prof. Lee Fairlie PI)*

COVID vaccine Implementation Science

A COVID-19 vaccine plan led by the Implementation Science team. *(Prof. Saiqa Mullick PI)*

HPTN084 CoVPN Preparedness Fund

To provide support to Ward 21 CRS #31966, to strengthen their site capacity to participate in large Phase 111 efficacy trials. *(Prof. Sinead Delany-Moretlwe PI)*

COVID-19 Sero Survey

A cross-sectional COVID-19 survey involving questionnaires and seroprevalence, with the aim of measuring and understanding COVID-19 perceptions and impacts among residents of Hillbrow. *(Dr Thesla Palanee-Phillips PI, Prof. Matthew Chersich PI)*

B-Wise Social Media: Supporting SA youth with HIV edutainment bursts

This initiative enables innovative solutions focusing on the HIV prevention among vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 crisis. *(Prof. Saiqa Mullick PI)*

The Health Care Worker Health and Wellbeing Study

This study focuses on health and mental wellbeing of health workers providing care to patients with COVID-19 in Johannesburg, South Africa: rapid needs assessment and action research. *(Prof. Lee Fairlie PI)*