

June, 2020

The role of Emergency Plus Medical Services (E-Plus) in containing COVID-19

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The role of Emergency Plus Medical Services (E-Plus) in containing COVID-19

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Emergency Plus Medical Services, E-Plus is the largest private emergency medical services provider in Kenya. Operating over 128 ambulances in the country, the company has employed about 400 staff. With the advent of COVID-19 pandemic, the government through the Ministry of Health contracted E-Plus to provide exclusive ambulance services as part of the government's response to potential cases of infection and preparedness to contain the spread of COVID-19. Quickly, E-Plus increased its fleet base in Nairobi and designated 20 fully equipped units to support Covid-19 operations with a dedicated dispatcher to handle COVID-19 related cases. The goal is to contain viral exposure by keeping suspected patients in quarantine at home and away from the public. Upon excluding medical emergency, if the call is concerning COVID-19 and fulfills either the clinical or epidemiological criteria, it is transferred to the COVID-19 dispatcher.

E-Plus Dispatch Centre is manned by highly trained medics who coordinate with the representatives from the Ministry of Health (MOH) to facilitate contact tracing and evacuations of the infection cases across the country. Over 50 paramedics and management staff are always on their toes to ensure smooth coordination of COVID-19 cases. On a daily basis, over 100 calls are received at the Dispatch Centre with different cases of

emergencies. Above that, E-Plus also coordinates directly with the Kenya Red Cross Emergency Operations Centre to support other emergency cases. As the pandemic progressed the number of calls increased to almost 200/day.

The Ministry of Health developed clear protocols of handling suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 and communicated to all agencies supporting the operation including E-Plus. Patients clearly not exposed to an index case, can return to their normal routine. If exposure is confirmed, they are instructed to stay in home quarantine (for 14 days) under supervision and monitoring of the Ministry of Health. If the case is suspicious of COVID-19, a physician from the Ministry of Health then decides whether to send a nurse together with a paramedic with personal protective equipment to the home to collect samples for testing. E-Plus has trained over 20 paramedics who support the exercise of collecting sample on need basis. Cases, where COVID-19 are confirmed, are transported by paramedics on a dedicated ambulance to any of the appointed hospitals.

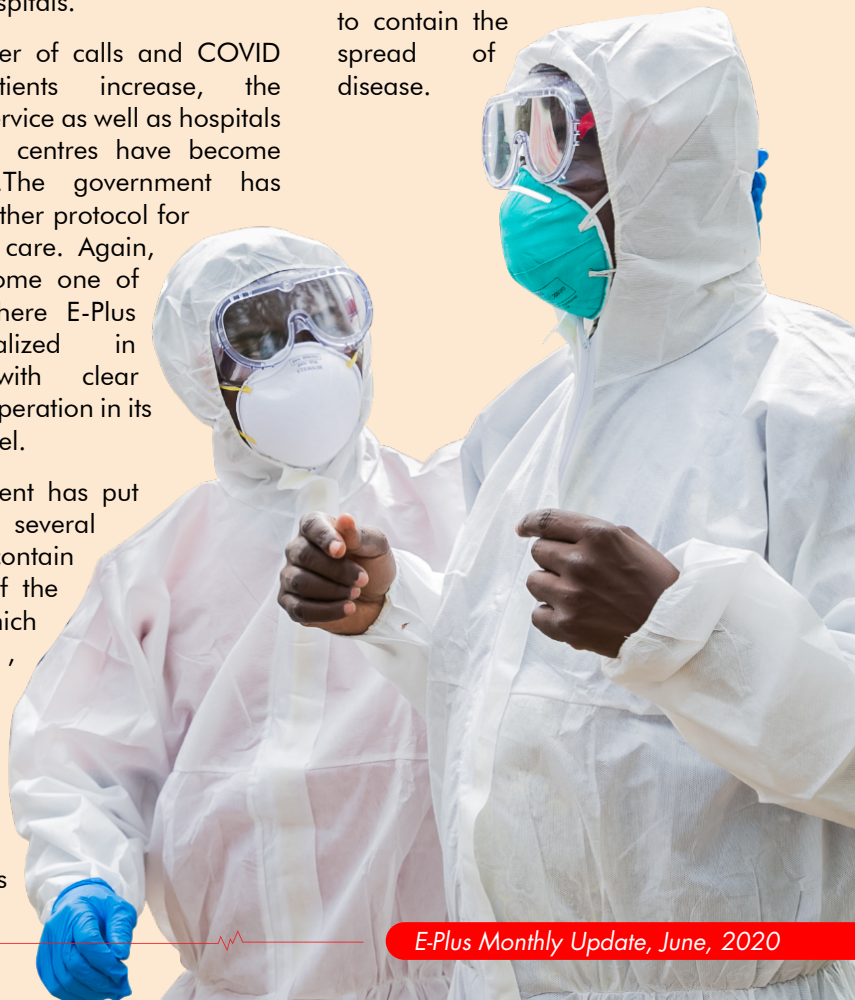
As the number of calls and COVID positive patients increase, the ambulance service as well as hospitals and isolation centres have become overwhelmed. The government has designed another protocol for home based care. Again, this has become one of the areas where E-Plus has specialized in previously with clear protocols of operation in its business model.

The government has put in place several measures to contain the spread of the disease which include, cessation of movement and curfew. Most of patients with pre-existing conditions

have been recommended for homebased care where conducive. From E-Plus' experience, this measure is one of the best to ensure safety while offering the best medical care needed at home.

Maximizing EMS during a pandemic by adopting telemedicine is another aspect which has come in handy. E-Plus launched eDoc, a virtual platform offering care for patients remotely where the provider and patient are not physically present with each other has minimized movements, cost of transport as well as turn-around time to offer medical care. Needless to say – exposure to COVID-19 infection is also controlled through telemedicine services. Customers have a rare opportunity to access this service online through the website or phone calls.

Carrying out phone triage, home testing, and drive-in testing significantly decreases visits to physicians' offices and hospitals, allowing early identification of those infected. These activities contribute to the effort to contain the spread of disease.



Impact of Covid-19 on EMS

While most people shelter at home, Emergency medical technicians and paramedics go toward the danger. Working in chaotic conditions and unpredictable environments, they are a resilient bunch trained to respond to everything. But, operating against an invisible virus that kills so indiscriminately is different.

COVID-19 has affected everyone in one way or the other. We all know someone who is affected, not necessarily medically but people who've been laid off, changes in their work arrangements or affected in any other way.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has also brought changes to the Emergency Medical Services sector.

For one, the norms of first responders have changed. Every COVID-19 call is treated with utmost precaution. The paramedics have to fully don the PPEs before going for a COVID-19 call. This is not the norm with other emergency runs and as such, the patients get uneasy or scared on seeing the paramedics in full gear.

Secondly, there are new protocols and guidelines that have been adopted to reduce and prevent the levels of contamination for the crew as well as the equipment.

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EMS providers globally are now getting the recognition they deserve

The pandemic has also led to increase in technological advances. Many EMS and healthcare providers are now turning to telemedicine. This has made it easier for patients to get the healthcare they require without the trouble of actually leaving their homes. In places like America, equipment is also being advanced as there's more need to stabilize patients while en route to hospitals.

EMS providers globally are now getting the recognition they deserve. These are the people who have first contact with the patients potentially putting their lives in grave danger, thus they're being recognized as essential services.



COVID-19 testing for staff



On Friday 19th June, 2020 E-Plus staff underwent another round of COVID-19 testing. This testing is essential in that it ensures the safety of our staff especially those who are in the frontline and are facing the pandemic head-on in their daily duties. It was also done as a control measure to ensure a safe working environment for all our staff and to remove any sort of doubts or fear that many may have had of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

Contribution of County Government on COVID-19 Mitigation

In the past few days the number of COVID-19 new cases have been increasing rapidly. The Council of Governors together with the ministry of health have been meeting up and addressed the following:

Community surveillance

This has been thriving due to a coordination mechanism put in place by the county governments. This makes it easier to get information on suspected cases for isolation and to trace new visitors to counties

Helpline for GBV survivors

Sadly, the extended stay at home and quarantine periods have left many women and girls at the mercy of their abusers. This has increased the rates of gender based violence and as such some counties have taken initiatives

such as putting up toll free helplines for the survivors to enable access to a professional counsellor and to help.

However, there are some challenges that the county governments face which include;

Disbursement of Funds

The government still has not disbursed all the funds required by the county governments for the year 2019/2020. The lack of funds has often caused delay in employee salaries resulting to demotivated employees with lack of morale in executing their duties

Floods

Most parts of western and North Rift region continue to experience floods which are causing displacement and increase in risk of waterborne diseases and Malaria.

The Positive Effects of COVID-19



With so many negative aspects surrounding the COVID-19 crisis, it almost sounds hypocritical to talk about the positive impacts that might have been brought about by this deadly virus that has distorted our lives in unimaginable ways. However, it is important to note the few good things brought about by this pandemic. By this, we receive greater strength to continue fighting this enemy and to move forward.

So what are some of these impacts?

Nature is thriving

Without us constantly running around to many different places nature is beginning to return to homeostasis and balance.

For example, less air pollution and the return of wildlife in areas that haven't been seen for a long time.

We have more time for family

The forced isolation has served as a reminder of how much our loved ones mean to us.

And with this newfound importance of connection, families are coming together in ways like never before.

We realized we are all equal with regard to the force of nature

Rich or poor, great or small, this virus has impacted all of us. It doesn't discriminate and can affect just about anyone.

Such a blow of global proportions has broken down the barriers between us and we no longer see ourselves as superior or inferior to others.

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The forced isolation has served as a reminder of how much our loved ones mean to us

We have time to think

Before COVID-19 we used to run around with little time to stop and think.

Now our lives have slowed down and we are starting to ask ourselves how do we move forward from here?

Is our previous lifestyle sustainable?

How can we arrange our time to live our best life?

These questions are already the beginning of something great and will prove to be the spark that propels humanity into its next phase of development.

E-Plus Evacuates Government Staff involved in Chopper Crash

On Saturday 13th June, 2020 during the early morning hours, a police chopper carrying a security team crash-landed in Kaithe, Meru. Six people; two pilots and four passengers were aboard the chopper when it crashed into a banana plantation narrowly missing two houses. It is still unknown what exactly caused the accident but bad weather is suspected to have been a main factor. Meru police commander Patrick Lumumba said the team was heading to Marsabit for a security meeting.

The passengers sustained some injuries. Our teams were on site and provided ground evacuations to the casualties who were then taken to Meru airstrip to be airlifted to Wilson airport. Our team were on standby and evacuated the casualties from Wilson Airport to Memorial Hospital for further treatment.



E-Plus COVID-19 Preparedness and Response

- E-Plus continues to work with the ministry of Health to support COVID-19 response for suspected cases and confirmed cases.
- E-Plus management team continues to hold briefings and monitoring sessions on the preparedness and response to the pandemic.
- E-Plus has stepped preparedness measures by procuring and distributing of necessary PPEs to all staff in the frontline.
- We continue to sensitize and train staff on the emerging updates around COVID-19.
- E-Plus normal operations continue uninterrupted. Ensuring every Kenyan with different emergency needs are responded to without delay.
- E-Plus continues to sensitize public on the COVID-19 measures through social media platforms.
- Through strategic communications approach, E-Plus continues to engage media to celebrate the great work of paramedics especially during this pandemic times.
- E-Plus has been engaged by Westgate Mall and TRM to provide COVID-19 screening at the gates.
- E-Plus is exploring new approaches to business operations in the advent of the novel virus to ensure the needs of our clients and stakeholders are met sufficiently.
- E-Plus Acquires 10 More Ambulances as a Measure to Support COVID-19 response.

E-Plus Preparedness Activities



Training of Staff on Preparedness and handling of patients –
300



Evacuation of COVID-19 suspected and confirmed cases –
1723



Contact Tracing of COVID-19 cases –
86



Second Testing of Staff for COVID-19-
65



Training paramedics and EMTs on COVID-19 Swab collection; to support the exercise periodically -
66
staff trained



LMA Training
62

Monthly Observations & Recommendations



More and adequate supply of protective gear for the staff in the frontline



Continuous daily briefings are helping for timely address of key issues of concerns for smooth operation



Psychosocial support for the ambulance crew



Continuous motivation for the staff during this pandemic

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak Situation

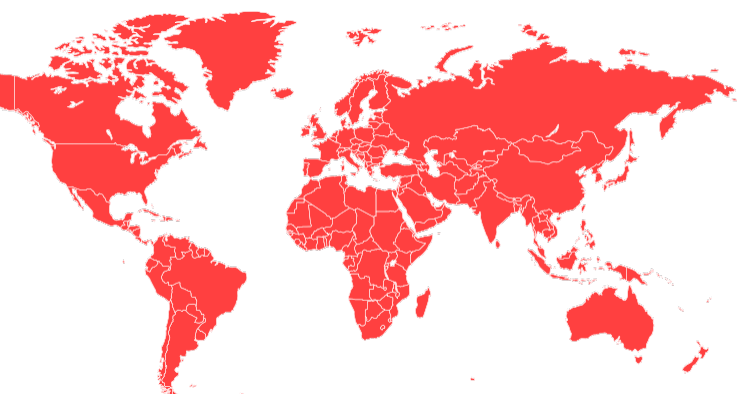
Global COVID-19 Update

10,185,374

Total Confirmed

503,862

Deaths



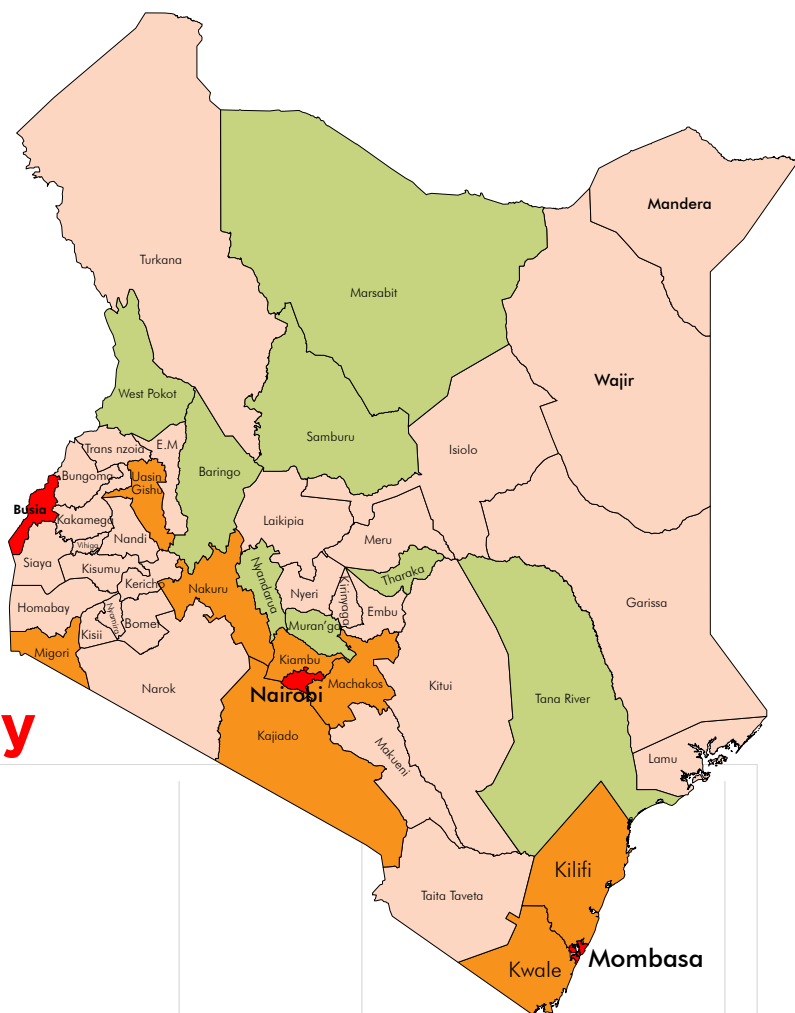
Kenya COVID-19 Update

6,366 **2,039** **148**

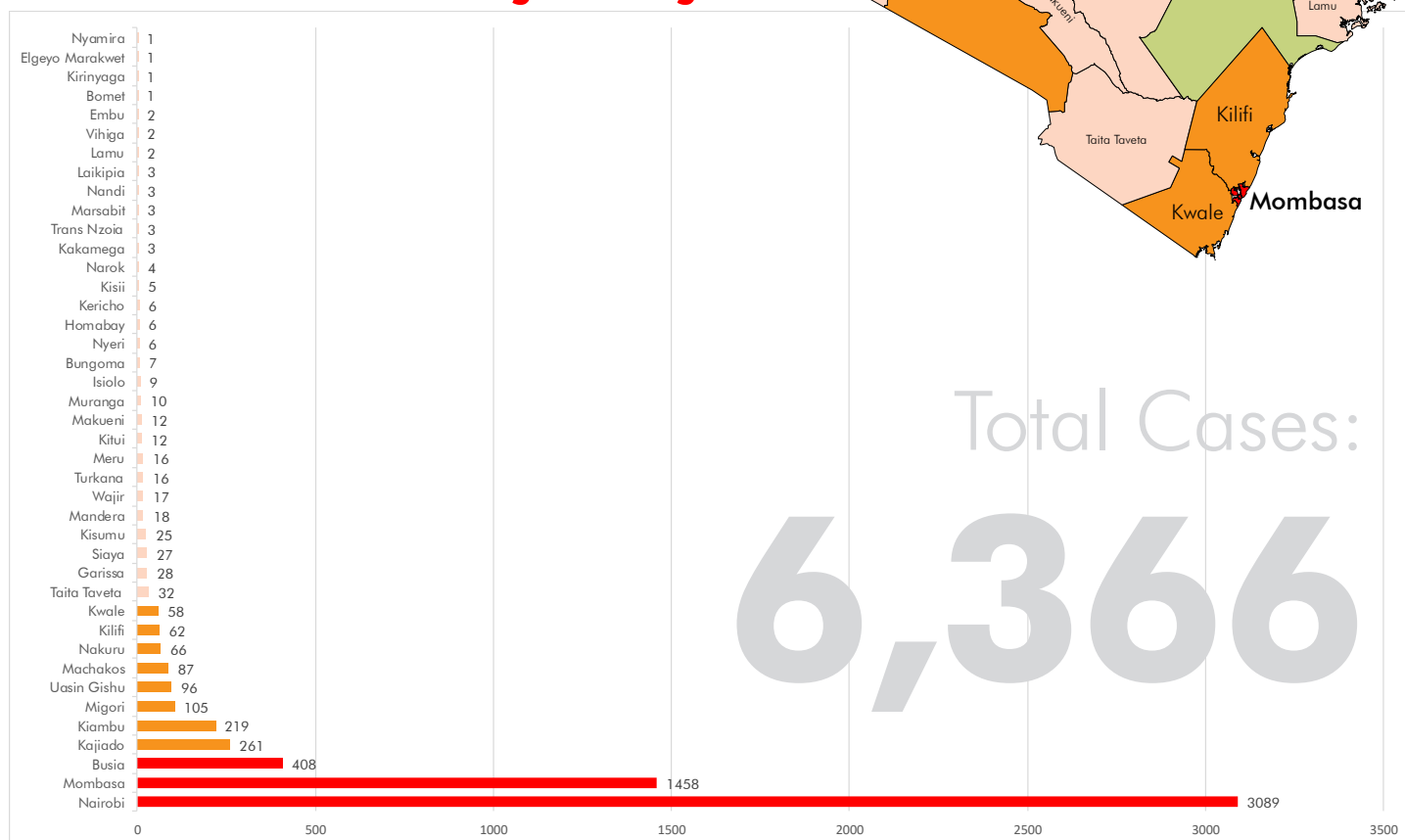
Confirmed

Recovered

Deaths



COVID-19 County Tally



Total Cases:

6,366

■ Most affected ■ Moderately affected ■ Slightly affected ■ Not affected

Data as at Tuesday 30th June, 2020 | Source: MoH & WHO

Measures taken by the Kenyan Government this month

- Continued targeted mass testing in different regions
- They are in the process of rolling out home and community based care as majority of the patients are asymptomatic and can be treated at home.
- Grant of Ksh.5 billion to all 47 counties to deal with COVID-19 in a bid to boost level of preparedness and readiness.
- On Thursday 18th June, 2020 the highest number of deaths within 24 hours were 10 and on Saturday 27th June, 2020 MoH announced the highest number of positive cases of 260.
- Targeted mass testing continues in areas deemed as COVID-19 hotbeds, this was done even deep into Marsabit county.
- New measures for hotel staff; once tested, they do not need to be tested again unless they show signs of COVID-19.
- Community sensitization and awareness activities carried out in many areas including Eastleigh and Kajiado.

by E-Plus

- Continuous staff briefings on preparedness and response for COVID-19
- Staff testing on Friday 19th June, 2020
- 1723 Evacuations done as at Tuesday 30th June, 2020



E-Plus in The News

Evacuation for COVID-19 patients in the country now presents a clear reason why EMS policies should be in place to regulate ambulance operations.

[On Peoples Daily news paper\(Friday 26th June, 2020 Page 12\)](#)

E-Plus Facilitates Counselling Session to Staff

E-Plus team has been in the frontline since the COVID-19 pandemic was confirmed in the country. Four months down the line their work continues day and night. During this time, the ambulance crew face different challenges. Such challenges include handling confirmed cases of COVID-19-which in most cases pose traumatic experiences to them. Recently, E-Plus lost one of the paramedics to a road accident. Such unexpected incidences affect staff in different ways.

Counseling is one of the ways that E-Plus has embraced as a way to support the staff to handle difficult moments. On Monday 26th June, 2020 E-Plus organized a group counselling session with all staff at logistics centre. The session was aimed at helping the staff amplify the vision of such traumatic experiences and discover the proper potential in dealing with them and enhance their work morale. The session involved management staff and staff working within Nairobi facilitated by external counsellors.



We will appreciate your comments for the next issue