

Uganda Public Health Fellowship Program

High-risk exposures among truck drivers testing positive for COVID-19 at Uganda borders: a qualitative study, May-June, 2020

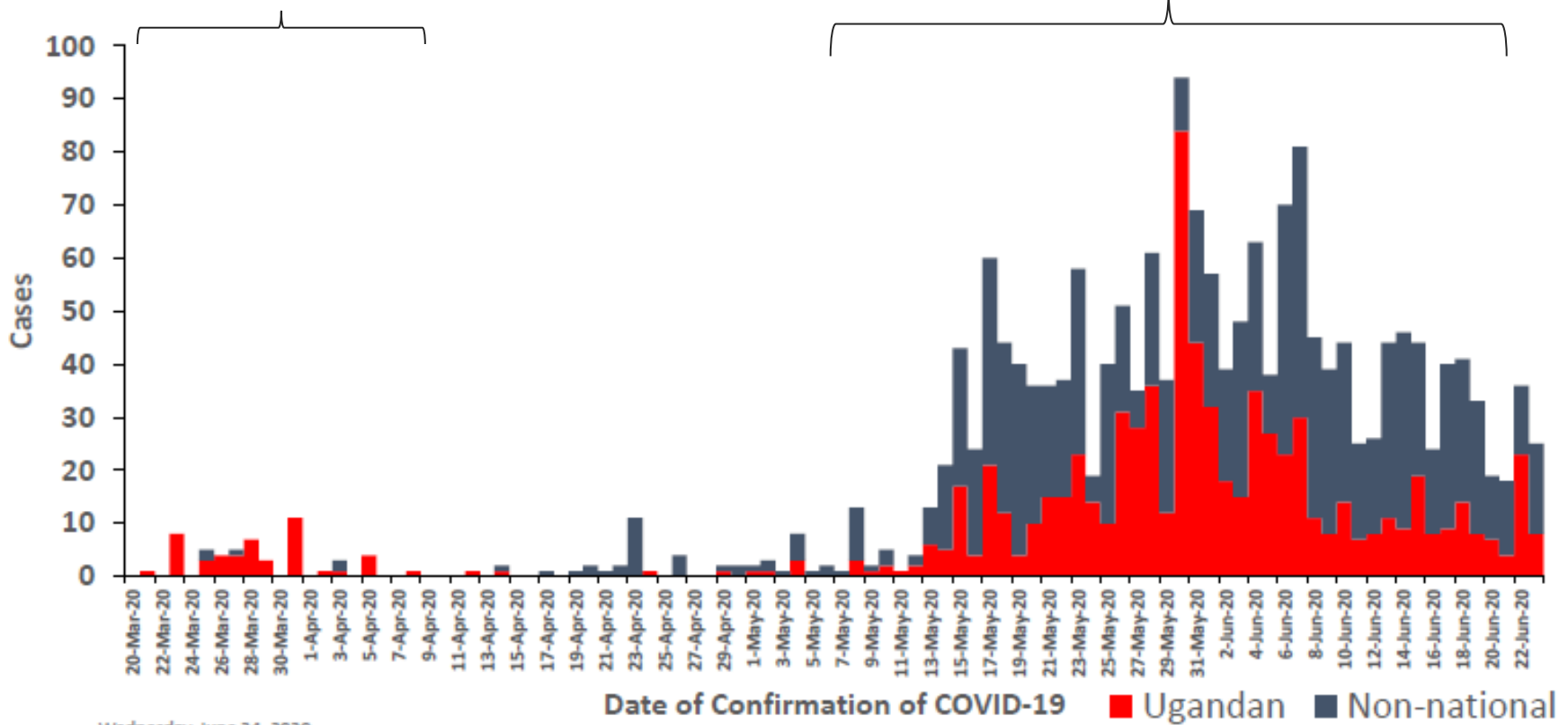
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COVID-19 in Uganda, Mar-June 2020

Mostly foreign travelers at airport and their contacts

Mostly truck drivers and their contacts



Wednesday, June 24, 2020

COVID-19 among truck drivers in Uganda, 2020

Challenges to COVID-19 Prevention in Uganda

- **Uganda a landlocked country**
 - Depends on cargo from neighbouring countries
 - Drivers travel by road
- **Starting March was in full lockdown mode with airport and all land borders closed**
 - Cargo trucks had to be let in
 - Required a negative COVID-19 test to be allowed in
 - Restriction on stops (seclusion areas)

Trucker Protection Project

- **Increasing truck driver cases in late April and early May**
- **Community began stigmatizing truck drivers**
- **There was need to target and protect truck drivers and Ugandan citizens**

Objectives

- **Identify exposures common among truck drivers that put them at risk of COVID-19**
- **Develop targeted interventions to reduce the risk of infection**

Interviews with truck drivers

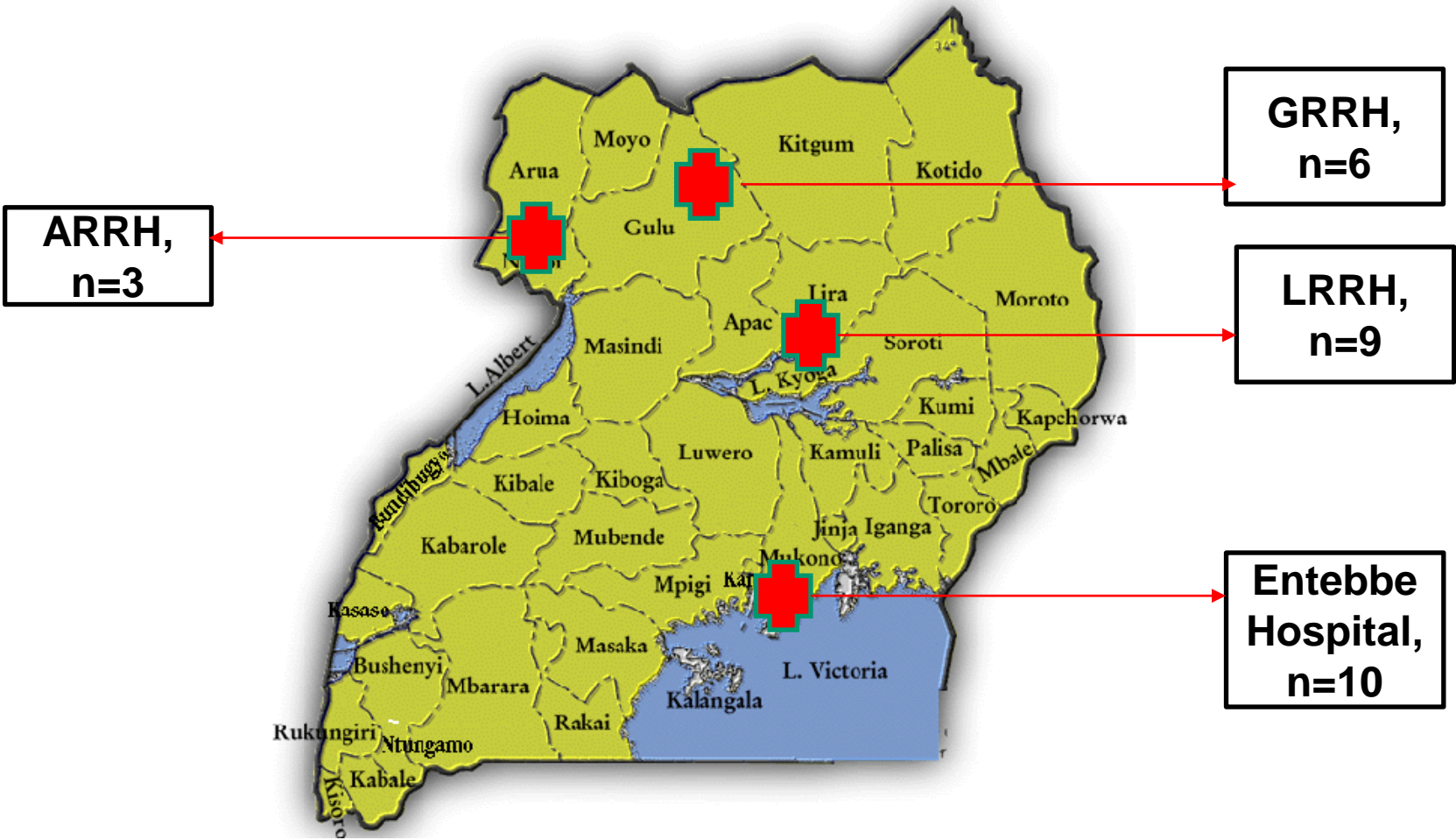
- **Conducted from May 19 - June 4, 2020**
- **Drivers who crossed into Uganda & tested COVID-19 (+) since May 13, 2020**
 - **Used in-depth interview tool**
 - **Recreated route, entries & exits to country, designated & undesignated stops, activities**
 - **Asked about persons with whom truck drivers interacted during two weeks before entry**
 - **Qualitative data organized by thematic content**

- **Visited isolation & treatment units with full PPE to conduct interviews with truck drivers**
 - **25 had entered through Elegu**
 - **2 through Malaba**
 - **1 through Mutukula**
- **Drivers' Network of Uganda called drivers when PHFP team arrived at site to explain the approach**

Investigation team at isolation units



Sites visited



An average of 3 days' delay at POEs



Interactions at POEs and seclusion areas



Overcrowding at POEs and seclusion areas



12

Little use of face masks at POEs and seclusion areas



No social distancing or WASH facilities at POEs and seclusion areas



Additional exposure factors

Possible exposure	% respondents
Biometric fingerprint machine	75
Interactions with female sex workers	36
Unprotected interactions with authorities (Port Health, immigration and customs)	36
Authorities handle documents of different drivers without gloves	36

“I feel so concerned about the biometric fingerprint machine at the border where every truck driver is required to take a fingerprint. It is not sanitized neither do the truck drivers sanitize before and after use. This could also be spreading the disease.”

- ESJ, Truck Driver



Forced passengership

- **All truck drivers who crossed to Uganda through Elegu POE reported forced to carry passengers by security personnel on the road**

“Yes, the police in South Sudan ask us to carry passengers while on the road. The passengers are usually coughing and do not use face masks. The worst thing is that in South Sudan, people do not believe in COVID-19. They believe that their temperature is hotter than everywhere in East Africa and that the heat is enough to kill the virus.”

– BH, Truck driver

Humiliating manner of evacuation to isolation



Multiple exposures put truck drivers at risk

- **Delays at POEs**
- **Overcrowding at both POEs and seclusion places**
- **Use of biometric fingerprint machine without disinfection**
- **Forced carriage of passengers while transiting through South Sudan**
- **Authorities handling documents of different truck drivers without gloves**

Recommendations

- **Accelerate sample collection, testing, and POE clearance**
- **Procure a GeneXpert machine with appropriate human resources to reduce turnaround time**
- **Intensify behavior change communication at POEs**
- **Institute cross-border collaborations between Uganda & neighboring countries**

Public Health Action

- **Data shared each morning with Truckers' Network & bi-weekly with IMT at MOH**
- **GeneXpert machine placed at Elegu POE reduced turn around time for COVID-19 testing and associated delays for truckers**

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Acknowledgement

- **Ministry of Health, Uganda**
- **Makerere University School of Public Health**
- **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
- **Uganda Drivers Network**
- **COVID-19 isolation & treatment units**

