

4.3.1 Successful countries were proactive, unsuccessful ones denied and delayed

The Panel's review of a range of country responses up until March 2021^(b) demonstrates that countries that recognized the threat of SARS-CoV-2 early, and were able to react comprehensively, fared much better than those that waited to see how the pandemic would develop. The early-responding countries acted in a precautionary way to buy time, while getting information from other countries, particularly from Wuhan in China where the impact of the lockdown showed that stringent measures could effectively stop the outbreak.

Response models developed in relation to earlier outbreaks, including SARS and MERS, were rapidly adapted to the specific characteristics of this novel virus and its pathways of transmission. The 2003 SARS epidemic had left a permanent mark, especially in the most affected east Asian and south-east Asian countries. SARS resulted in governments instituting whole-of-government approaches with clearly defined, tiered command structures to prepare for and respond to future outbreaks, with clear involvement of communities and transmission of information. Health protection functions were consolidated under new centralized agencies.



Effective and high-level coordinating bodies were critical to a country's ability to adapt to changing information

Even though Ebola virus disease is a very different type of disease to COVID-19, countries with that experience drew on it to rapidly establish coordination structures, mobilize surge workforces and engage with communities.

National responses were most effective where decision-making authority was clear, there was capacity to coordinate efforts across actors, including community leaders, and levels of government, and formal advisory structures were able to provide timely scientific advice that was heeded. **Effective and high-level coordinating bodies were critical to a country's ability to adapt to changing information;** in the context of a pandemic caused by a novel pathogen, adaptability has been vital.

The strategies chosen by countries to respond to COVID-19 played out in very different ways. In analysing national responses, the Panel has identified three distinct strategic approaches: aggressive containment, suppression or mitigation. In addition, there are some countries without any discernible or consistently applied strategy.

^b The Panel has conducted a review of policy responses in 28 countries selected to represent different regions and the best, worst and median outcomes, measured by deaths per 100 000 population.