



World Health
Organization

Western Pacific

From containment to suppression: WHO and Lancet COVID-19 Commission highlight lessons from the Western Pacific Region

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Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, Dr Takeshi Kasai and expert panellists across Asia and the Pacific explored lessons from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) suppression at a forum jointly hosted today by the *Lancet* COVID-19 Commission and the World Health Organization (WHO). Speakers from Australia, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Viet Nam highlighted experiences that can inform the next phase of the COVID-19 response.

Almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the countries in WHO's Western Pacific Region have managed to avoid large-scale community transmission. While the Region's 37 countries and areas are home to more than a quarter of the world population, they have less than 1.4% of globally confirmed cases to date.

There is no simple or singular explanation for the Region's relative success in suppressing transmission of the virus thus far, but important lessons can be identified from countries' experiences of the response. These include the importance of preparedness and health systems strengthening, and the vital role of testing and contact tracing as part of a comprehensive public health response. Other lessons take into account the role of health communication in entrenching social norms

around protective behaviours such as mask-wearing, handwashing and physical distancing, and the importance of regional solidarity and the “neighbourhood effect” – countries in the Region benchmarking themselves against others that are aiming to suppress transmission.

“There are many factors that help to explain why our Region has fared relatively well. For example, long-term investment and commitment to preparedness and building response capacities, testing and contact tracing linked to strong public health systems, good systems for multi-source surveillance, strong communication and regional solidarity. None of these things are unique to the Western Pacific Region, but they have come together this year in a unique way – sparing us from the scale of devastation from this virus that we are currently seeing in other parts of the world. But this is obviously no time to be complacent: the pandemic is far from over, and how it evolves in the next phase depends on our individual and collective actions,” said Dr Kasai, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific.

“The Western Pacific Region of WHO has valiantly battled COVID-19 with overall results that surpass those of other global regions. Our meeting was an important opportunity to assess progress, share knowledge, and identify the continued challenges and the best strategies to address them,” said Prof Sachs, Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and Chair of the *Lancet* COVID-19 Commission.

During the forum, high-level Member State representatives highlighted the role of non-pharmaceutical interventions such as movement restrictions in suppressing transmission of the virus. They also emphasized the importance of community support for public health measures and establishing and sustaining social norms around individual protective behaviours.

Notes to editors

The forum was live-streamed on [WHO’s Western Pacific Region YouTube channel](#) and the recording remains available at: https://youtu.be/Qt_hQBu0M5I.

Remarks by Dr Takeshi Kasai: <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/news/speeches/detail/from-containment-to-suppression-covid-19-lessons-from-countries-in-the-western-pacific-region-joint-forum-with-the-lancet-covid19-commission>

WHO is working with governments and partners to make the Western Pacific, home to 1.9 billion people across 37 countries and areas, the healthiest and safest region.

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The *Lancet* COVID-19 Commission is an interdisciplinary initiative across health sciences, business, finance and public policy.

More info: <https://covid19commission.org/>

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Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, France (which has responsibility for French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna), Hong Kong SAR (China), Japan, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macao SAR (China), Malaysia, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (which has responsibility for Pitcairn Islands), the United States of America (which has responsibility for American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam), Vanuatu, and Viet Nam.