Írta: Gabriella Gombár
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As a public health emergency of international concern, the COVID-19 pandemic (caused by the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus) has drawn global attention and response. As of 19 March 2020, 51 of 53 countries in the WHO European Region have reported confirmed COVID-19 cases. Each of these countries has initiated a range of measures to mitigate the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and reduce the impact of the outbreak on healthcare systems, including shifting of healthcare resources to the COVID-19 response.

In planning these measures, due consideration should be given to minimizing the excess risk of morbidity and mortality from vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) that would result if immunization services are disrupted. Any disruption of immunization services, even for short periods, will result in an accumulation of susceptible individuals, and a higher likelihood of VPD outbreaks. Such outbreaks may result in VPD-related deaths and an increased burden on health systems already strained by the response to the COVID-19 outbreak.