Coexistence and management of COVID-19 pandemic with other epidemics in West Africa: lessons learnt and policy implications.

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Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in West Africa, the region has faced a coexistence of epidemics raising questions about the management of the coexistence between COVID-19 and other epidemic prone diseases. We undertook a cross-sectional study covering the period from February to August 2020 in which an extensive desk review was completed and questionnaire was submitted to National Public Health Institutes. In addition, we conducted online interviews with 10 West African countries to discuss in-depth the strategies and challenges in managing the coexistence of epidemics. Eight epidemics coexisted with COVID-19 in West Africa. These epidemics were yellow fever and measles in five countries; meningitis in 4 countries; vaccine derived poliomyelitis and dengue fever in two countries; Lassa fever, Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic fever and hepatitis E virus in one country. COVID-19 pandemic has brought both positive and negative effects to the management of other epidemics. The management of coexistence was similar in most ECOWAS countries with different incident management systems set up to manage separate outbreaks. The experience in managing the coexistence of epidemics led Africa CDC and ECOWAS Regional Center for Surveillance and Disease Control to recommend to member states that they should reinforce regular disease surveillance for seasonal outbreaks and country specific epidemiological diseases profile while not forgetting other emerging and reemerging infectious diseases.