

## ITM shows link between COVID-19 and malnutrition

**Especially sub-Saharan countries that suffer from a high disease burden due to malnutrition also have high COVID-19 mortality rates**

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Dit is de omschrijving

**A recent global study by the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp shows a clear correlation between malnutrition and fatal COVID-19. On a global analysis, countries where both a high burden of malnutrition and elevated COVID-19 case fatality ratios coincide are mostly located in sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly across the Sahel strip. The study, that has been published in [Frontiers](#), provides important information for COVID-19 response plans in malnourished countries.**

The ongoing pandemic of the corona virus disease is currently a major cause of global mortality. Malnutrition is the primary cause of immunodeficiency worldwide, which increases vulnerability to infections. "It is assumed that there is a link between malnutrition and COVID-19 but more research is needed", says Dr José L. Peñalvo as Head of the Unit of Non-communicable Diseases at ITM.

Together with his colleague, researcher Dr Elly Mertens, they used estimates from the Global Burden of Disease 2019 and other open-source data. "We identified malnourished countries based on four indicators: death rates for child growth failure such as stunting and wasting, years lived with disability due to obesity and iron and vitamin A deficiencies. Then we compared these data from 172 countries with the number of deaths caused by COVID-19. We also considered other factors related to COVID-19 mortality, so that our results are focused on malnutrition", says Dr. Mertens.

The outcome? There is a correlation between malnutrition and COVID-19 deaths. "Countries ranking high on at least three malnutrition indicators have increased rates of fatal COVID-19. Especially the sub-Saharan African countries Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Sudan and Tanzania, as well as Yemen and Guyana are vulnerable", says Dr. Peñalvo. "Food security, good nutrition and social protection should be a priority for the COVID-19 response plans in these countries."