COVID-19: Key tips and discussion points for field staff, community workers, volunteers and community networks

This guide contains information for field staff, volunteers and community networks. It sets out tips for engaging with communities, questions to ask, and appropriate answers about COVID-19.

Rumours and misinformation about the disease often lead to confusion and unhealthy behaviours. People get different information from media, friends, family, social media, organizations or other sources. Some of these sources may give conflicting information.

What happens when people receive an overload of information that includes rumours and misinformation about a problem?

The situation can become even more difficult to manage. For example, people might:

- find it difficult to identify a solution
- fear and mistrust health recommendations.
- resist and deny the situation.
- stop accessing healthcare.
- ignore life-saving health advice including prevention measures (such as quarantine) from authorities and health services.
- refuse help from health workers, often with threats or violence.
- mistreat people who have been or seem to be sick. This can happen even when they are cured already due to a lack of knowledge about effectiveness of treatment.

Field staff, volunteers and community networks are in a strong position to build trust with communities and community leaders. You should listen to people and respond to their questions, fears and misinformation with clear, timely, useful, fact-checked information. This way people have the right information to respond to risks and prevent the spread of COVID-19, Content of this guide:

Step 1: how to engage - simple tips for interacting with communities.
Step 2: ask the right questions - Key guidance for community discussions, including addressing stigma and xenophobia.
Step 3: what to say - essential knowledge to share with communities and Frequently Asked Questions that can guide your discussion.

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Step 1: how to engage

This section provides key tips and information to share with communities. National staff should adapt this guidance and keep it up to date.

- Explain **who you are, which organisation you come from and what you do** in the community. This can include:
  - o We work to share accurate information about COVID-19 and its symptoms. We also work to share what people can do to protect themselves and their communities from it.
  - o To do this, the teams reach out to community members in several ways, such as radio, SMS message, posters, billboards, face-to-face visits, and community meetings.
  - o **Introduce yourself and show empathy**: We understand you are all worried about this new disease. We are here to help you understand it and make sure you know what you can do to protect yourself and others.
- **Understand what people are saying**: Listen first to what people have to say about COVID-19 before sharing what you know. We might also need to collect information to better understand the community and its concerns, so that we can adapt our activities and information to better meet their needs. The activities can be adapted to what they need most

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Four facts about myths and rumours

1. Myths and rumours often occur when people do not have enough accurate information and understanding about a disease. They can occur when there are strong cultural beliefs surrounding the disease or prevention measures.
2. Myths or rumours can also happen when contradictory messages come from different sources
3. Myths and rumours can increase fear among communities, which can unfortunately keep individuals, households and communities from practicing the correct prevention and control practices
4. This means that providing accurate information to increase knowledge and understanding about transmission of COVID-19 is important and can change the myth or misconception.

- **Encourage awareness and action:** Use familiar words and language (don't use abbreviations or foreign language terms, when you must use them make sure to explain them clearly) and include practical advice people can act on. For example:
  - ✔ an <u>instruction</u> to follow, such as "If you get sick, seek medical care at hospital xyz"
  - ✔ a <u>behaviour</u> to adopt, such as "Wash your hands frequently to protect yourself and others from getting sick"

✔ information they can <u>share with friends</u> and family, such as where and when to access services. For example, "Treatment is free of charge and available at health facilities xyz".

✔ information that addresses <u>myths and misconceptions</u> in the community, such as "It is safe to receive a package from China as COVID-19 do not survive long on objects.

- Engage people in a conversation - first listen, to understand key concerns and questions. Ask people what they already know, want and need to know about COVID-19. Involve them in designing and delivering health activities, because they are more likely to trust you and the information you share, and play an active role in prevention measures.

- Explain a few, clear and simple messages to the community, including families, care givers, and local leaders. Use the language they prefer and avoid unfamiliar or technical terms. For example, use "spreading" in preference to "transmission"

- Make sure everybody understands the information you give them. Ask questions to assess levels of understanding

- Ask members of the community and community leaders to share your information. People are more likely to pay attention to information from people they already know, trust and whom they feel are concerned about their wellbeing.

 REMEMBER: Be honest when you don't know something and tell the community that you will try and find out and come back to them

- Do not attach race or location to this disease e.g the Chinese virus
- Do not refer to people as cases or victims. Talk about people who have or are being treated for COVID-19.
- Do not repeat rumours.

Step 2: ask the right questions

Learn more about people's concerns and the questions they have. Answer those questions.

REMEMBER: answers to some questions about COVID-19 are on page 6.

Key guiding questions for starting a dialogue with people and communities (translate and adapt to local context).

- What have you heard about COVID-19?
- What information would you like to know about COVID-19?
- Do you know what the symptoms are?
- Do you know what to do if someone in your family or community gets sick with cold-like symptoms?
- Would you be afraid of someone who has COVID-19?
- Do you know how to prevent yourself and your loved ones from getting COVID-19?
- Do people in your community wash their hands regularly? If yes, why? And if no, why not?
- Do people in your community keep a safe distance (i.e 1 meter – 3 feet from another person) and cover their mouths with a tissue or elbow when sneezing? If yes, why? And if no, why not?
- Do members of your household open windows and doors to let fresh air in and thoroughly clean surfaces to kill germs?
- Do you think there is a group/or person in your community who is responsible for spreading the virus? (check stigmatizing attitudes). If people refer to a specific group, ask an additional question: Why do you think these people are spreading the virus in your community?

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Step 3: what to say?

Update this part of the document regularly based on new questions, misunderstandings of community members and new health information. Always add the date the document was last updated. Last update 23 February 2020.

What is the novel (new) coronavirus disease COVID-19?
● Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found in both animals and humans. Some infect people and cause illness ranging from a cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Use local names for these diseases.
● COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus first found in Wuhan, China in December 2019.
● There are still some things we don't know about the virus, but researchers are working hard to find out how to prevent and cure it.

How dangerous is it?
● For most people, COVID-19 is mild and similar to a cold (runny nose, fever, sore throat, cough and shortness of breath);
● It can be more severe for some people and can lead to pneumonia or breathing difficulties.
  ○ For example, older people, and people with a weak immune system or existing illnesses (such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart or lung disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.
● The disease can lead to death, but this is rare.

How does someone get the virus?
● A healthy person can get the virus from an infected person. The virus spreads through direct contact with drops of saliva containing the virus. These fluids come out of the nose or mouth.
  ○ For example, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, these droplets can enter the eyes, nose or mouth of another person or
  ○ when an infected person sneezes and coughs into their hands and touches another person or a surface

● When a person touches surfaces and objects that are contaminated by those droplets. It is not yet known if and how long the virus lasts on surfaces, but hand sanitizer with 70% alcohol can kill it
● COVID-19 is usually transmitted through **close contact** with an infected person, for example, when caring for them. "Close contact" means physically touching them, touching items they have used or coughed on, or spending a lot of time within 1 metre of them while they are sick.

What can I do to protect myself and my family?
Here are five precautions you and your family can take to avoid infection:

1. **Wash your hands frequently** using soap and water. If soap is not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70% alcohol) to wash away germs.

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2. **When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth or nose with your bent elbow. or a tissue. Throw the tissue into a covered bin.** Try not to sneeze and cough into your hands because then you will spread the virus with your hands. If you cough or sneeze into your hand, don't touch anything and immediately wash your hands with soap and water.

3. **Avoid close contact** with anyone who is coughing, sneezing, or sick. Keep at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance and encourage them to go to a nearby healthcare centre.

4. **Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth**. Hands touch many things which can be contaminated with the virus.

5. **Go to the doctor** if you have a fever, cough or feel that it is difficult to breathe. This is the best way to look after yourself and stop the infection spreading to your family and others. Make sure to first call the doctor and let them know your symptoms so you don't infect other people.

Cough/sneeze into your bent elbow or a tissue to stop spreading the germs.

REMEMBER: older people and people with health issues are more likely to get sick. We need to protect them and stop spreading germs!

What should I do if a family member or I have symptoms?

- Seek medical care early if you or your family member has a fever, cough or difficulty breathing.
- Call your doctor or health provider before coming to the clinic. You should also call if you have travelled to an area where COVID-19 has been reported, or if you have been in close contact with someone with who has travelled from one of these areas and has symptoms.

REMEMBER - If an infected person does not go to the health centre or ask for help, they may be at higher risks of becoming very ill and spreading the virus.

Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19

Regularly update with verified information (last updated 23 February 2020).

Is COVID-19 very contagious? (Is it easy to get the virus?)
Infection takes close, direct contact with a sick person (or with objects and surfaces a sick person has used). Many people who get the disease are caregivers and family members caring for a sick person without personal protective equipment.

Can I get COVID-19 by talking to someone or sitting next to them?
You are very unlikely to catch the virus by talking to people or walking in the street. Being nearby a person generally doesn't spread the virus. There is no chance you will get the virus if you have not travelled to the affected countries recently or have not been in contact with a person who is sick with COVID-19.

Are there any specific medicines to prevent or treat COVID-19?
The disease can be treated, and many people have already recovered from it. While there is no specific medicine recommended, those infected with the virus should receive care to relieve and treat symptoms. Those with severe illness should get care in a hospital.

Is there a vaccine against COVID-19?
There is no vaccine yet because this is a new virus. It takes time to develop a new vaccine that is efficient and safe. Researchers are working on it.

Does having a COVID-19 patient in a hospital in my country put all people at risk?
Hospitals are prepared to care for patients with infectious diseases. Having a COVID-19 patient in a hospital means they will receive the right treatment to help them get healthy and prevent the disease from spreading.

Should we avoid people coming from China?
We should use the same protective measures with any person who may be sick and who has symptoms like a cold. These symptoms include a runny nose, fever, sore throat, cough and shortness of breath. Protective measures include washing hands often with water and soap or alcohol-based hand gel to wash the germs off hands; staying at least 1 metre (3 feet) from anyone who is coughing, sneezing, or sick, and encouraging them to go to a nearby healthcare centre.

Should we avoid Chinese food?
COVID-19 is not spread by eating Chinese food. It is safe to eat any fully cooked food in a hygienic and clean environment.

How can I keep my child safe?
Teach your children to wash their hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitiser. Also teach them to cough or sneeze into their bent elbow or into a tissue and put the tissue directly into the garbage and wash their hands right after. Keep windows open at home and on public transport so the air circulates and carries germs away.

Do I need a mask to protect myself against COVID-19?
No, the best thing you can do to protect yourself COVID-19 is to simply wash your hands well and often.

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- If you're healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person that might have COVID-19.
- If you are sneezing or coughing often, wear a mask so that you don't spread the virus through coughing or sneezing around other people or onto surfaces.

You can find more information on the WHO site (in several languages) https://www.epi-win.com/

And further resources on risk communication and community engagement and accountability here: https://www.communityengagementhub.org/what-we-do/novel-coronavirus/

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