

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Preparedness and Response UNFPA Interim Technical Brief

For the latest evidence, see the World Health Organization COVID-19 site:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Adolescents and Young People & Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) UPDATED

Key Messages

Core Messages

- **In the context of COVID 19, with the disruption of schools, routine health services and community-level centers, new ways of providing information and support to adolescents and young people for sexual and reproductive health and rights need to be established.**
- **Young people can be an important resource in mitigating risks, and community outreach in this crisis.**

- Young people exposed to COVID-19 are as likely as old people to become infected and contagious. They should therefore strictly follow national guidelines around screening, testing, containment and care and practice social distancing.
- Young people's formal education, where they have access to it, has been severely impacted by the pandemic. According to the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 107 countries have implemented nationwide school closures, impacting over 861.7 million children and youth.
- Young people are also affected by closures of non-formal education opportunities, which deprives them of social engagement with their peers and educators. Prolonged periods of closures and movement restrictions may lead to additional emotional unrest and anxieties. If caregivers are infected, quarantined, or pass away, protection and psychosocial issues for adolescents need to be addressed. Education, social support mechanisms and access to health services need to be maintained with parents and/or guardians playing a key role.
- Adolescent and youth, especially adolescent girls and young women, who already tend to face very high levels of domestic and intimate partner violence, may experience even higher levels of violence driven by quarantine and isolation. Single adolescent parents will have no choice but to continue working and providing for their children.

- Many vulnerable young people, such as young migrants, young refugees, homeless young people, those in detention, and young people living in crowded areas such as townships or slums, live in conditions that put them at greater risk of contracting COVID-19. They also have limited access to technology and alternate forms of education and information, including on how to mitigate exposure to COVID-19.
- Young people with HIV, who bear a disproportionate burden of the global HIV epidemic, are at greater risk due to weak immune systems and dependency on regular supplies for antiretroviral medication, and other services, which may not be prioritized
- With prolonged stress on the health system to address COVID-19, a disruption of the normal delivery of sexual and reproductive health services and information to young people will need to be addressed. The need for mental health services and counselling is paramount, as many people, including young people, are facing high levels of anxiety and stress related to COVID-19. Appropriate measures will be required to protect vulnerable groups such as young migrants, young refugees, youth in detention, youth with disabilities, youth living with HIV and young people living in poverty.
- Young people represent a valuable resource and network during crises and public health emergencies. With the right training on the disease and its transmission, young people can work jointly with the health authorities to help break the chain of infection.
- In spite of digital inequalities, this generation of young people is more connected through technology, media and the internet than any other generation. In this time of social distancing and lockdowns, many young people's ease with technology will be vital in keeping communication channels open, informed and supportive of each other and the larger community. They can play a critical role in disseminating accurate information on COVID-19 and support information sharing on risk reduction, national preparedness and response efforts.

UNFPA Response Interventions

- **Support young people in risk communication and virtual community engagement:** UNFPA will draw on its extensive networks of youth organizations and partners to cultivate compassion, raise awareness of and protection from the virus, promote healthy behaviour in their communities and sharing of correct information to promote prevention, using a variety of online tools and channels. This will include translating vital resources into local languages, using digital technologies, and combating misinformation and xenophobia around the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Strengthen the capacity of youth organizations to engage safely,** effectively and meaningfully in ways that enable young people to augment their knowledge on the virus and play an effective role in the prevention and response, including as social and community workers and as assistants to professional health staff, where needed and possible.
- Ensure that measures are in place to **prevent, protect and mitigate the consequences of all forms of violence, stigma and discrimination against adolescents and youth** - especially girls and young women - during quarantine and self-isolation processes and procedures.

Provide factual, age-appropriate information about the virus and concrete instructions about how to prevent its spread. UNFPA country offices will adopt creative and flexible outreach strategies to reach young people through digital platforms which UNFPA is already using to promote comprehensive sexuality education and social and behavioural change communication in order to contribute to the uptake of the recommended behaviours e.g. washing hands and keeping social distance. (More information and youth-friendly material on adolescent and youth can be found on the [COVID response page](#) on the website of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action).

- UNFPA, through its country offices, will support where possible *continuity of education through non-formal education or recreational activities* – (See IFRC /WHO/UNICEF guidance to keep schools safe during the outbreak:
https://www.unicef.org/media/66036/file/Key%20Messages%20and%20Actions%20for%20COVID19%20Prevention%20and%20Control%20in%20Schools_March%202020.pdf)