



**COVID-19  
RESPONSE**

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION REGIONAL OFFICE FOR AFRICA SUPPORTS THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

# Prevention and Risk Communication

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## Risk Communication

Risk Communication(s) refers the real-time exchange of information, advice and opinions between experts or officials and people who face a threat (hazard) to their survival, health or economic or social well-being. Its ultimate purpose is that everyone at risk is able to take informed decisions to mitigate the effects of the threat (hazard) such as a disease outbreak and take protective and preventive action.

For public health emergencies, risk communication includes the range of communication capacities required through the preparedness, response and recovery phases of a serious public health event to encourage informed decision making, positive behavior change and the maintenance of trust.

Every public health event response is different because of varying political situations, socio-cultural contexts, demographic and geographical factors; environmental and social determinants of health and governance systems. Therefore, risk communication and operational plans must be contextualized.

In-depth Knowledge of how the virus is spread and steps to prevent infection is not enough, so there is a need to take into account Health Promotion strategies to support individuals, families and communities to make informed choices. Healthy public policies to facilitate behavior change and providing an enabling environment are relevant to promote the required behaviors to prevent and control COVID-19. Stakeholders, engagement, planning and buying in is critical for behavior change.

It is of utmost importance to understand that the behavioural objectives of outbreak response inform the communication objectives and that there may be several communication objectives directed at securing the intended behavioural result which contribute to compliance to the outbreak control measure (which should be technically-sound, realistic, and culturally appropriate). The key messages must support the changes you want to see and should

## The key messages must support the changes you want to see and should

1. Address the event, risk and interventions,
2. Talk about the event, risk and interventions,
3. Acknowledge uncertainty and/or fear,
4. Express that a process is in place,
5. Give people things to do (taking into account their context),
6. Address concerns of target audiences as well as those who influence them.

## Common symptoms OF COVID-19 disease

The disease causes respiratory illness with signs and symptoms such as a cough, fever, fatigue, and in more severe cases, difficulty breathing. New symptoms recently identified in some patients include loss of taste and/or smell and red eyes.

## How does COVID-19 spread

1. People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus.
2. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a COVID-19 infected person coughs or exhales (breath out).
3. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person.
4. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
5. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a COVID-19 infected person who coughs out or exhales droplets.

## Prevention behavior for COVID-19

### Hand hygiene

To protect yourself and others against COVID-19, clean your hands frequently and thoroughly. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer for at least 20 seconds or wash your hands with soap and water for at least 40 seconds. If you use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, make sure you use and store it carefully.

## **Respiratory etiquette**

The virus can spread directly from person to person when a COVID-19 case coughs or exhales producing droplets that reach the nose, mouth or eyes of another person. When coughing or sneezing, cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or use a disposable tissue. Discard the tissue immediately after use and wash your hands.

## **Physical and social distancing**

The virus can spread directly from person to person when a COVID-19 case coughs or exhales producing droplets that reach the nose, mouth or eyes of another person. Maintain at least 1 meter distance between yourself and others

Avoid going to crowded places. Where people come together in crowds, you are more likely to come into close contact with someone that has COVID-19 and it is more difficult to maintain physical distance of 1 meter.

## **Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth**

Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

## **Use of medical masks**

Medical masks used by health care workers reduce the transfer of saliva or respiratory droplets from the wearer to others and to the environment. They also decrease the likelihood of potentially infectious droplets from others reaching the mouth and nose of the mask wearer.

Hand hygiene should be performed before putting on a clean mask and after removing the mask. These masks should be worn tightly around the chin and top of the nose. The wearer should avoid touching the mask while it is on the face and the mask should be immediately discarded if it becomes moist. Importantly, wearing a mask must be combined with other preventive measures including performing frequent and appropriate hand hygiene and physical distancing of at least 1 meter (3 feet).

## Use of nonmedical masks

Non-medical masks are intended to prevent the wearer transmitting infection to others. The following should be considered when choosing a good non-medical mask: number of layers of the fabric/tissue; breathability of material used and the fit of the mask.

Care must be taken when using mask to prevent self-contamination by touching and reusing contaminated masks. Masks must be worn together with other preventive measures such as physical distancing and hand hygiene.

## Health workers

Health workers should ensure the following:

- **Reinforce standard precautions to take care of all patients:**
  - Apply WHO's "My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene" before touching a patient, before any clean or aseptic procedure, after exposure to body fluid, after touching a patient, and after touching patient's surroundings.
  - Practice respiratory etiquette at all times.
  - Manage waste properly
  - Correctly clean and disinfect surfaces
- **Reinforce contact and droplet precautions** when caring for all patients with acute respiratory illness.
- **Reinforce the rational, correct and consistent use of personal protective equipment (PPE)** when taking care of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.