



Instructions for messaging on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Internal Guidance (v. March 31, 2020)

1. Objective

This guidance is developed to ensure that CRS staff communicates the same messages on Coronavirus to communities across the country program, aligned with the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

2. Who & When to Use

- **Who uses it?** CRS staff who is communicating and/or interacting with community members (e.g. shura members, CBE teachers, parents, students, the wider community).
- **When do we use it?** By phone and/or in-person when distributing IEC materials (respecting *CRS Afghanistan Staff Engagement with Communities during COVID-19 SOP*)
- **How do we use it?**
 - This guide for staff who interacts with community members.
 - Staff should use this document as talking points to provide community members with key knowledge on COVID-19, particularly around transmission, prevention, and symptoms.
 - If community members are already familiar with a certain topic, the staff member may elect to move onto the next topic.
 - If community members ask a question that the staff member is unable to answer, please do not try to make up an answer as **misinformation can be dangerous**. Instead, tell them that you do not know the answer, that you will try to find out and get back to them. Get their contact information so you can provide feedback later. Make sure that you do respond back later. If you do not have an answer, you may also refer them to the Ministry of Public Health's hotline number: 166.

3. Key Talking Points

(1) What is Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

- Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person, caused by a new strain of coronavirus first discovered during an investigation into an outbreak in December 2019.
- COVID-19 is a new strain of virus, previously unknown, from the coronavirus family of viruses, which affect humans. COVID-19 has now spread globally, including to Afghanistan.
- The official name for the disease COVID-19 has the following meaning: the “co” stands for Corona, “vi” for virus and “d” for disease, 19 is because the disease emerged in 2019.
- The disease has now spread to many countries in the world, including Afghanistan and many of its neighboring countries such as Iran, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and India.
<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>
(check number of cases in Afghanistan, the world, and the total number of countries at this website before calling/visiting a community in case community members ask).
- The first case of COVID-19 in Afghanistan was confirmed on February 24 in Herat from an individual who recently returned from Qom, Iran.
(Check latest information on which provinces in Afghanistan have confirmed cases).
- Because the virus is newly discovered, there are still some things we do not know about the virus, but researchers are working hard to find out how to prevent and cure it.

(2) How does COVID-19 spread?

- People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus.
- People who have the virus may or may not seem very sick, or sick at all, but they can transmit the virus whether or not they appear to be sick.
- Many people with COVID-19 experience only mild symptoms. This is particularly true at the early stages of the disease. It is therefore possible to catch COVID-19 from someone who has, for example, just a mild cough and does not feel ill.

- The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 2 meters) through droplets exhaled from the nose or mouth produced when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or exhales. These droplets are inhaled by people nearby, transmitting the virus.
- Another way the virus is transmitted is when these droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, where droplets have landed, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Depending on the type of surfaces and conditions, the virus can survive for a few hours or up to several days.
- As this is a new virus whose source and disease progression are not yet entirely clear, it is important to take more precautions until further information becomes available.

(3) Can people in Afghanistan get COVID-19?

- Yes. There are currently confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Afghanistan, and these cases are increasing. As COVID-19 can spread from person to person, it is possible to contract the disease in Afghanistan. However, proper precautions will reduce the risk of transmission and minimize the impact of the disease.

(4) What are the symptoms of COVID-19? (COVID prevention poster can be used as visual aid for this section)

- The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, dry cough, shortness of breath.
- Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea.
- These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but do not develop any symptoms and do not feel unwell.
- Most people recover from the disease without needing special treatment.
- However, some people do fall seriously ill and develop difficulty breathing. Some patients have pneumonia in both lungs, multi-organ failure and in some cases death. People have died in Afghanistan from the disease.
- Older people, and people with weak immune system or pre-existing medical conditions (such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart or lung disease) appear to be more vulnerable to developing serious illness more often than others.
- The “incubation period” means the time between catching the virus and beginning to have symptoms of the disease. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days.
- The implication of the incubation period is that the virus can be spread by people who might not seem sick, and it is important to take precautions between people and within communities that may have been exposed. These precautions are relevant for everyone and for all communities, regardless of how remote it is.

(5) How to protect yourself against COVID-19? (COVID prevention poster can be used as visual aid for this section)

- Most important thing is to wash your hands with soap and water regularly throughout the day, as well as before and after meals, after using the toilet, when you return to the home after being outside, after interacting with other people or animals.

WHY? Washing your hands with soap and water kills viruses that may be on your hands.

- Avoid shaking hands, hugging and kissing others, including family member and friends.
- **WHY?** The virus is spread easily between people who are in close contact with one another. You do not know whether the other person has COVID-19 or not because people with COVID-19 may or may not appear sick.
- Avoid gatherings of more than a few people, particularly in enclosed areas and/or when keeping distance of 2 meters minimum is not possible.

WHY? When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease

- Avoid gatherings of more than a few people, particularly in enclosed areas and/or when keeping distance of 2 meters minimum is not possible.

WHY? The virus is spread easily between people who are in close contact with one another.

- Do not touch your face, eyes, mouth or nose with your hands, particularly if you have not just washed them.

WHY? 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.

- Do not spit. This rule applies to those who use snuff or snack on seeds.

WHY? Spitting actively spreads droplets which increases the risk of transmission for you and the people around you.

- Maintain a distance of at least 2 meters from people, especially from those who are sick, even if they only have mild symptoms. Given the severe outbreak in Iran, one should also take particular care in maintaining distance from those who have returned from Iran less than 14 days ago.

WHY? The virus is spread easily between people who are in close contact with one another. You do not know whether the other person has COVID-19 or not because people with COVID-19 may or may not appear sick.

- When you cough or sneeze, cough into your elbow, down and away from people around you. Make sure your mouth is fully covered. Wash your hands with soap immediately after you cough or sneeze. If you use a tissue or cloth, make sure it is properly disposed in the bukhari or trash, or washed immediately.

WHY? Droplets spread virus. By following good hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

- Disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched in your home, such as door handles. Common household bleach can be used as a disinfectant. Bleach should be handled with care as it can cause harm to your skin and eyes. Bleach should be diluted at a ratio of 1:100 if used. In the absence of bleach, you may use soapy water, but you will need to ensure that surfaces are scrubbed thoroughly.

WHY? The virus can survive on surfaces if left uncleaned. People then catch COVID-19 by touching these surfaces.

- If you feel unwell, seek medical help at the nearest medical facility the soonest possible and stay at home. Wear a mask if you are sick and are in public areas, or if you are caring for someone who is sick. There is unfortunately a worldwide shortage of masks, so the best measures are the ones mentioned above. In particular, washing your hands and maintaining distance with others.

(6) 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.
- **The affected person should stay at home until medical care is confirmed.**
- **Regular cleaning** frequently touched surfaces throughout the patient's care area such as beside tables, bedframes and other bedroom furniture. Cleaning and disinfection of bathrooms should be done at least daily, with alcohol or bleach-based cleaners
- **Call a doctor or health provider** before going to the clinic and ask them what the guidance is on suspected COVID-19 cases. They may ask you if you have traveled recently, or if you have been in close contact with someone with who has travelled from one of these areas and has symptoms. The Ministry of Public Health has a hotline (166) to obtain further information. Please check the list of focal points for your province.
- To date, there is no vaccine and no specific antiviral medicine to prevent or treat COVID-2019. Antibiotics do not work against the coronavirus. However, those affected should receive care to relieve symptoms. People with serious illness should be hospitalized. Most patients recover thanks to supportive care.
- The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue, and maintain a distance from people who are coughing or sneezing.

(7) When should I wash my hands to prevent COVID-19 transmission? (Handwashing poster can be used as visual aid)

- Before, during and after you prepare food.
- Before and after eating.
- After using the latrine
- After cleaning a baby
- Before feeding a child
- After coughing or sneezing.
- After touching animals or animal waste.

- In homes, schools, public spaces such as markets, places of worship, bus stations, regular handwashing should occur before entry and after exiting.
- Functioning handwashing facilities with water and soap should be near latrines (within 100m).

(8) How do I wash my hands correctly to prevent COVID-19 transmission? (Handwashing poster can be used as visual aid)

- Wash your hands with soap and running water thoroughly for at least 30 seconds, according to the steps detailed in the handwashing techniques in the posters in your community.
- Water and soap is incredibly effective if used properly and thoroughly. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is a substitute only if you do not have immediate access to soap and water, but it is not more effective than soap and water.
- COVID-19 is not visible to your eyes. Even if your hands look clean, they are not. Remember to wash your hands periodically throughout the day, keeping the frequency to at least every hour, or when you have done one of the activities above in the 'when should I wash my hands' section.
- COVID-19 virus is physically broken by the chemicals of soap and the action of washing your hands, which is why it is important to wash frequently and properly, to make sure your hands are as clean as possible, often.
- Be careful not to contaminate your hands when you turn the water tap on and off, or when you hold the water pitcher to wash your hands. Wash the handle with soap and water, so that when you touch it, your hands will not be contaminated.
- To avoid touching any taps or pitchers when washing your hands, consider installing this hand washing stations: (CRS may consider doing a demonstration to communities later if there is an interest)

Simple Tippy Taps



References:

Center for Disease Control (CDC) *What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)* World Health Organization (WHO) *Q&A on coronaviruses (COVID-19)* <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>