**MESSAGE GUIDELINE**

**COVID-19**

***((Inclusive for HIV, TB infections)***

**(For the Health Promotion**

**and Patient & Community Support teams)**



NOTES

* This version is not the final one as our understanding of the disease is still evolving. We will update the message guide as soon as we receive new information from experts.
* For suggestions, questions, feel free to contact Pauline.Kennes@Brussels.msf.org or Jesse.Verschuere@Brussels.msf.org. For questions specific to HIV, TB please contact kleio.iakovidi@joburg.msf.org
* This guide serves only as support for health promotion and Patient & Community Support (PCS) teams for developing HP activities and designing HP materials. The guide should not be read to the target population.
* This is a guide; the formulation of the messages must be adapted to the context and the target population. Prioritisation of messages and their relevance will be also dependent on the context and target population.
* For face to face HP sessions, a flipchart can be used whose drawings illustrate the key messages that are mentioned this guide. A round of Questions and Answers must be organized at the end of each HP session.

**What is Corona Virus?**

The current Corona Virus Disease (or COVID-19) is caused by a virus, which was discovered in early January in China and has been identified as a member of the family of coronaviruses.

The virus is causing severe respiratory disease including pneumonia. Like all viruses, it needs cells of living beings to multiply itself. This virus seems to target cells in the lungs, and possibly other cells in the respiratory system too, which causes severe respiratory disease, including Pneumonia. Cells infected by the virus will produce more virus particles, which can then spread to other people by coughing, for instance.

**What are the symptoms?**

The main symptoms **include general weakness and fever; dry cough, sore throat and it can lead to breathing problems. The symptoms are like those of a common cold or a flu.**

Symptoms can evolve with pain in the thorax, very high fever, breathing difficulties requiring receiving oxygen and support for respiration, worsening of existing diseases that patients already have (such as chronic lung diseases and asthma, heart disease, diabetes…) etc.

**How dangerous is Corona Virus?**

Our understanding of the virus and the disease is still evolving. Many people infected with the virus will not be very sick. It is even possible that some people don’t get sick at all if they’re infected.

The latest estimates are that around 80% of the people who get infected develop mild to moderate symptoms (fever and couch); around 15% develop severe symptoms (difficulty of breathing and shortness of breath), and around 5% become critically ill (lung failure, septic school, organ failure and risk of death).

The disease seems more dangerous for older people and people with pre-existing medical conditions, (for example patients with cardiovascular disease or pulmonary TB). (More than 80% of the people who died of COVID-19 were over 60 years old, and over 75% had underlying medical conditions.)

**How is COVID-19 transmitted?**

**COVID 19 is mainly spread** **from person to person through infected droplets.** Droplets are small drops of secretion from the airways, that can be spread by coughing, sneezing or speaking, which can enter the human body through the mouth, nose or eyes.

This can happen by breathing in infected droplets, or by touching with your hand a surface on which droplets have landed and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose.

The virus can be spread by infected people with symptoms, but it can also be spread by infected people without symptoms.

**How can I prevent myself from being infected?**

**It is very important to apply hand hygiene (hand-washing), coughing etiquette, avoid close contact with people showing symptoms of respiratory diseases, and inform the doctor when feeling sick.**

* **Hand hygiene is crucial** [ on average a person is touching his/her face 22 times/hour] so if your hands have been in contact with contaminated objects or surfaces, you can infect yourself easily if you don’t wash your hands.
* **Wash your hands regularly with soap and water.**

**< before and after eating**

**< after using toilet**

**< after touching public things (e.g. using public transport)**

**< after sneezing/coughing**

**Soap and water will kill the virus,** so does alcohol or sanitary gel. It’s advised to spend at least 20 seconds washing all parts of both hands. If you don’t have easily access to a lavatory, carry with you a small bottle with soap mixed in water.

* As masks are scarce and strongly needed in medical structures, we don’t promote mask use among general population*. (We will elaborate more on this message in the next version, as we are currently consulting with IPC referents what could be alternatives for protection).*
* **Avoid going to crowded places and confined places** [good ventilation increases the fall of droplets and therefore it diminishes the risk of the droplets arriving to your body]
* **Avoid contact with people who are unwell.**
* If possible, try to keep at least **1,5 meter distance from other people.**
* **Practice cough hygiene:** catch coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues and throw away used tissues (and then wash your hands). If you do not have a tissue, use your sleeve.

**Why is there no vaccine to prevent yourself from getting the COVID-19?**

**There is currently no a vaccine to prevent the infection.**

Globally, scientists are working to develop a vaccine, but this will not be available for at least a year.

**What should I do, when I have flu-like symptoms?**

If you feel unwell or have one of the symptoms (fever, cough, flu-like symptoms) **stay at home and self-isolate yourself** to avoid infecting other people. If you live with HIV and/ or TB, and you experience one of those symptoms, please refer to the section with specific advice for People Living with HIV (PLHIV), TB at the end of this document.

If the symptoms persist or become worse, seek medical care (following the recommendations of your country; E.g. call your general practitioner).

**What does self-isolation involve?**

**Self-isolation means staying at home, not going to work, school or other public places and avoiding public transport**. You should also stay separate from people at home, avoid close contact and stay in a well-ventilated room.

Additionally to that, adhere strictly to all preventive measures:

* Wash your hands regularly and advise your caretakers to do the same.
* Separate household items and wash it with soap and water after each use.
* Monitor your symptoms.
* Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
* Cover your mouth with a scarf or tissue.

Ask for help if you need groceries, other shopping and medication.

**Who is most at risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19?**

**Older people** (and the older the worse) are more at risk of developing the severe form of the disease and /or having complications.

**People with existing diseases** such as chronic lung diseases, heart diseases and diabetes will also be more at risk of becoming severely ill and having their existing disease(s) worsening. There is evidence that people with TB infection or with active TB are at higher risk of infection and higher risk of severe disease.

Of course, many older people have also chronic diseases, which puts them particularly at risk of becoming critical and die.

This is **why it is very important to prevent older people and people with known chronic diseases getting in contact with potentially infected people.** (Don’t forget that people with very mild symptoms can transmit the virus).

**How about the risk of getting sick from COVID-19 for people living with HIV ?**

There is not much evidence yet on how covid affects people living with HIV but they are likely to be at higher risk, particular when they level a low CD4 or have other opportunistic infections.

People living with HIV who have not achieved viral suppression may have a compromised immune system that leaves them vulnerable to opportunistic infections (OIs) and further disease progression. In any case, PLHIV with symptoms need to be diagnosed for COVID-19 or other opportunistic infections and to be treated accordingly.

**Who is most at risk of being at risk?**

**People who have prolonged or frequent contacts** with a lot of other people, and particularly in “confined” places.

**Staff working in the health sector**: doctors, nurses, health care workers, psychologists, physiotherapists…

**Staff working in the social sector:** nursing homes, social workers, center for homeless, centers for migrants….

**Why are so few children affected by the disease?**

The full explanation is not known yet, but what has been documented is that children do become infected and they can transmit the disease to others. They only develop the mild forms and don’t require specific treatments nor hospitalization. But they should be prevented from close contacts with people at risk (older people, people with chronic diseases).

**What should I do if I have been in contact with an infected person or travelled to an affected area?**

You need to isolate yourself if you have been in contact with an infected person or travelled to an affected area. You may be qualified as **“contact” and you will be asked to self-isolate for 14 days.**

If you however have pre-existing health conditions (such as pulmonary TB, HIV): besides self-monitoring for COVID symptoms, ensure you are in phone contact with your regular health care provider and that you have enough ART or anti-TB medication supplies. This is important in order to ensure continuity of care and treatment with regards to your health condition (TB, HIV)

**How long can it take to develop the disease after being exposed to COVID-19?**

The average incubation period appears to be 4-7 days, and 95% of cases occur within 12 days of exposure. As such, a 14-day period has been established by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a likely maximum to be used as medical observation period or quarantine for exposed persons.

**How is COVID-19 diagnosed?**

There is no way to self-diagnose COVID-19.

The diagnosis is done by a doctor who will be looking at your clinical symptoms, medical history, travel history or contact history and then may order a **lab test for confirmation.**

 For the lab confirmation a nurse or doctor takes a **swab f**rom your nose and one from your mouth.

These swabs will be tested in a specialized laboratory and the results can take several hours to several days. While waiting the result, stay home and self-isolate.

**What is the treatment like?**

**Mild cases who can stay at home will need flu-like medication:** it is drugs against fever and maybe some drugs to prevent complications, depending on your general status.

Since it is a new virus, **there is currently no specific treatment to kill the virus,** although several drugs are currently being tested.

**For severe cases** that have breathing problems or develop complications treatment provided will be supportive and symptomatic. That means that treatment relies on keeping the patient’s body going, including giving **oxygen and breathing support** (when needed) for several weeks.

If you are already under TB and/or HIV treatment, ensure you do not stop your regular treatment

**How long is a person, who has been infected, able to transmit the virus?**

This is not known yet and will depend if the person made a mild or severe disease. It is assumed that once patients recover, they can still transmit the disease but for not longer than 2 weeks.

**Will I be protected once I have been cured?**

You will have made antibodies that will protect you; It is not clear how long this protection will last, but probably several months.

**Are pregnant women more at risk?**

There is currently no evidence showing that a pregnant woman would be more vulnerable to becoming sick or make a more severe disease than a non- pregnant woman.

There is also currently no evidence that a pregnant woman can transmit the virus to her fetus, neither that the virus can be transmitted through breastfeeding. However, the very close contact between the newborn and his/her mother is a risk for transmission through droplets and contact.

**Advice for TB patients and People Living with HIV**

Continuity of care is important both for HIV and TB patients, as well as early diagnosis and treatment for both TB and HIV.

If you are already under ART and/or TB treatment, do not stop taking your ARVs, TB medications. Continue your treatment so that your immunity is maintained/ boosted and you can be better protected against infections and diseases in general.

If you are under treatment for HIV and/or TB, discuss with your health care provider options about:

       longer medication refills and/or alternatives to Directly Observed Treatment  (for TB)

       possibility/alternatives for self-monitoring and exchange of information via sms/whatsapp when possible, instead of self-presenting to Health Facility

Avoid group interactions and unnecessary visits to health facilities unless:

       presenting with severe respiratory symptoms

       presenting with Advanced HIV Disease danger signs (such as high fever, unable to walk unaided, difficulty breathing, loss of appetite and loss of wait etc.)

       you need to get your medical follow up and drug refills

Always remember Infection Control measures at home and safe hygiene practices; if you are coughing, if possible, sleep in separate rooms from other family members

Practice physical distancing; but always keep a solidarity with your community to ensure safety and support for all

**What if I’m HIV/TB patient presenting flu symptoms?**

You will need to seek for medical care to make sure if it is COVID-19 or any other infection. It is advised to follow the national/local health authorities’ guidance not to unnecessary expose yourself to viruses. However it is important to seek medical care as soon as possible. Also, If you are out of treatment for HIV/TB your flu-symptoms can also be related to other infections besides COVID-19.

PLHIV: when possible, avoid unnecessary visits to health facilities unless presenting with severe respiratory symptoms or Advanced HIV Disease danger signs (such as unable to walk unaided, high fever, difficulties breathing, loss of weight, diarrhea/vomiting that doesn’t stop etc.) or for medical follow up/ medication refills