



MALAYSIAN RED CRESCENT



ONLINE EDUCATION

COVID-19 TASKFORCE

**COVID-19 AWARENESS
VOL. 2**

Dear all,

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease, COVID-19, to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. WHO stated that there is a high risk of COVID-19 spreading to other countries around the world. In March 2020, WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterised as a pandemic.

WHO and public health authorities around the world are acting to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. However, this time of crisis is generating stress throughout the population. The considerations presented in this document have been developed by the WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Use as a series of messages that can be used in communications to support mental and psychosocial well-being in different target groups during the outbreak.

Messages for the general population

1. COVID-19 has and is likely to affect people from many countries, in many geographical locations. When referring to people with COVID-19, do not attach the disease to any particular ethnicity or nationality. Be empathetic to all those who are affected, in and from any country. People who are affected by COVID-19 have not done anything wrong, and they deserve our support, compassion and kindness.
2. Do not refer to people with the disease as “COVID-19 cases”, “victims” “COVID-19 families” or “the diseased”. They are “people who have COVID-19”, “people who are being treated for COVID-19”, or “people who are recovering from COVID-19”, and after recovering from COVID-19 their life will go on with their jobs, families and loved ones. It is important to separate a person from having an identity defined by COVID-19, in order to reduce stigma.
3. Minimise watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19 that causes you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information only from trusted sources and mainly so that you can take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Seek information updates at specific times during the day, once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts; not rumours and misinformation. Gather information at regular intervals from the WHO website and local health authority platforms in order to help you distinguish facts from rumours. Facts can help to minimise fears.
4. Protect yourself and be supportive to others. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit both the person receiving support and the helper. For example, check by telephone on neighbours or people in your community who may need some extra assistance. Working together as one community can help to create solidarity in addressing COVID-19 together.
5. Find opportunities to amplify positive and hopeful stories and positive images of local people who have experienced COVID-19. For example, stories of people who have recovered or who have supported a loved one and are willing to share their experience.
6. Honour carers and healthcare workers supporting people affected with COVID-19 in your community. Acknowledge the role they play in saving lives and keeping your loved ones safe.

Messages for healthcare workers

7. Feeling under pressure is a likely experience for you and many of your colleagues. It is quite normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak. Managing your mental health and psychosocial well-being during this time is as important as managing your physical health.
8. Take care of yourself at this time. Try and use helpful coping strategies such as ensuring sufficient rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical well-being. The COVID-19 outbreak is a unique and unprecedented scenario for many workers, particularly if they have not been involved in similar responses. Even so, using strategies that have worked for you in the past to manage times of stress can benefit you now. You are the person most likely to know how you can de-stress and you should not be hesitant in keeping yourself psychologically well. This is not a sprint; it's a marathon.
9. Some healthcare workers may unfortunately experience avoidance by their family or community owing to stigma or fear. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones, including through digital methods, is one way to maintain contact. Turn to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted persons for social support – your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you.
10. Use understandable ways to share messages with people with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities. Where possible, include forms of communication that do not rely solely on written information.
11. Know how to provide support to people who are affected by COVID-19 and know how to link them with available resources. This is especially important for those who require mental health and psychosocial support. The stigma associated with mental health problems may cause reluctance to seek support for both COVID-19 and mental health conditions. The mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide includes clinical guidance for addressing priority mental health conditions and is designed for use by general healthcare workers.

Messages for team leaders or managers in health facilities

12. Keeping all staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health during this response means that they will have a better capacity to fulfil their roles. Be sure to keep in mind that the current situation will not go away overnight and you should focus on longer-term occupational capacity rather than repeated short-term crisis responses.
13. Ensure that good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to all staff. Rotate workers from higher-stress to lower-stress functions. Partner inexperienced workers with their more experienced colleagues. The buddy system helps to provide support, monitor stress and reinforce safety procedures. Ensure that outreach personnel enter the community in pairs. Initiate, encourage and monitor work breaks. Implement flexible schedules for workers who are directly impacted or have a family member affected by a stressful event. Ensure that you build in time for colleagues to provide social support to each other.

14. Ensure that staff are aware of where and how they can access mental health and psychosocial support services and facilitate access to such services. Managers and team leaders are facing similar stresses to their staff and may experience additional pressure relating to the responsibilities of their role. It is important that the above provisions and strategies are in place for both workers and managers, and that managers can be role-models for self-care strategies to mitigate stress.
15. Orient all responders, including nurses, ambulance drivers, volunteers, case identifiers, teachers and community leaders and workers in quarantine sites, on how to provide basic emotional and practical support to affected people using psychological first aid.
16. Manage urgent mental health and neurological complaints (e.g. delirium, psychosis, severe anxiety or depression) within emergency or general healthcare facilities. Appropriate trained and qualified staff may need to be deployed to these locations when time permits, and the capacity of general healthcare staff capacity to provide mental health and psychosocial support should be increased (see the mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide).
17. Ensure availability of essential, generic psychotropic medications at all levels of health care. People living with long-term mental health conditions or epileptic seizures will need uninterrupted access to their medication, and sudden discontinuation should be avoided.

Stay informed

Find the latest information from WHO on where COVID-19 is spreading: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

Advice and guidance from WHO on COVID-19 : <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
<https://www.epi-win.com/>

Addressing social stigma: https://www.epi-win.com/sites/epiwin/files/content/attachments/2020-02-24/COVID19%20Stigma%20Guide%2024022020_1.pdf

Briefing note on addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19:
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/other/interim-briefing-note-addressing-mental-health-andpsychosocial-aspects-covid-19-outbreak>

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1. Playlist on Mental health and psychosocial support in times of COVID-19

In times of COVID-19 it is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry.

This **learning playlist** includes online resources on **mental health and psychosocial support** to help you cope with the current challenges.

It might also be helpful for those trying to support others in this crisis.

All the resources for Malaysians are only available in English and you may find some of them in many other languages.

[Go to playlist](#)

Thank you

Best wishes.
#StaySafeShowLove

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