

# EHWP NEWSLETTER

## Social Stigma associated with COVID-19

### WHAT IS SOCIAL STIGMA?

Social stigma in the context of health is the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with a disease. Such treatment can negatively affect those with the disease, as well as their caregivers, family, friends, and communities. People who do not have the disease but share other characteristics with this group may also suffer from stigma. The current COVID-19 outbreak has provoked social stigma and discriminatory behaviours against people of certain ethnic backgrounds as well as anyone perceived to have been in contact with the virus.



### WHY IS COVID-19 CAUSING SO MUCH STIGMA?

The level of stigma associated with COVID-19 is based on three main factors:

- 1) it is a disease that is new and for which there are still many unknowns.
- 2) we are often afraid of the unknown; and
- 3) it is easy to associate that fear with 'others'.

It is understandable that there is confusion, anxiety, and fear among the public. Unfortunately, these factors are also fueling harmful stereotypes.

### WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

Stigma can undermine social cohesion and prompt possible social isolation of groups, which might contribute to a situation where the virus is more, not less, likely to spread. This can result in more severe health problems and difficulties controlling a disease outbreak. Stigma can:

- Drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination
- Prevent people from seeking health care immediately
- Discourage them from adopting healthy behaviours



## EFFECTIVE WAYS OF ADDRESSING STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH COVID 19

Evidence clearly shows that stigma and fear around communicable diseases hamper the response. What works is building trust in reliable health services and advice, showing empathy with those affected, understanding the disease itself, and adopting effective, practical measures so people can help keep themselves and their loved ones safe. How we communicate about COVID-19 is critical in supporting people to take effective action to help combat the disease and to avoid fueling fear and stigma. An environment needs to be created in which the disease and its impact can be discussed and addressed openly, honestly, and effectively.



1. COVID-19 has affected people from many countries, in many geographical locations. When referring to people with COVID-19, do not attach the disease to any 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, to reduce stigma.

3. 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.



4. 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.

Article adapted from: <https://www.unicef.org/documents/social-stigma-associated-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

### CONNECT WITH US



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