

SOCIAL STIGMA

Target audience

Government, media and local organizations working on the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

What is social stigma?

The negative association between a person or group of people who share a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, and experience loss of status because of a perceived link with a disease.

It can negatively affect those with the disease, as well as their caregivers, family, friends and communities. People who don't have the disease but share other characteristics with this group may also suffer from stigma.

What is the impact?

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

How to address social stigma?

- **Tips on How to Address and Avoid Compounding, Social Stigma**

DOs & DON'Ts

DOs	DON'T
Talk about the new COVID-19 disease	Attach locations or ethnicity to the disease
talk about, "people who have COVID-19" "people who are being treated for COVID-19" "people who are recovering from COVID-19" "people who died after contracting COVID-19"	refer to people with the disease as "COVID-19 cases" or "victims"
talk about people "acquiring" or "contracting" COVID-19	talk about people "transmitting COVID-19" "infecting others" or "spreading the virus" as it implies intentional transmission and assigns blame.
speak accurately about the risk from COVID-19, based on scientific data and latest official health advice.	repeat or share unconfirmed rumors, and avoid using words which generates fear like "apocalypse".
talk positively and emphasize the effectiveness of prevention and treatment measures. There are simple steps we can all take to keep safe.	emphasize or dwell on the negative, or messages of threat.

- **Tips on Possible Actions to Counter Stigmatizing Attitudes**

Spreading the facts

- Prioritize the collection, consolidation and dissemination of accurate country- and community-specific information about affected areas, individual and group vulnerability to COVID-19, treatment options and where to access health care and information.
- Use simple language and avoid clinical terms.
- Social media is useful for reaching a large number of people with health information at relatively low cost.

Engaging social influencers

- The information should be well targeted and the celebrities who are asked to communicate this information must be personally engaged, and geographically and culturally appropriate to the audiences they seek to influence. An example would be a vice-chancellor (or another key influencer) going live on social media and shaking hands.

Amplify the voices

- Stories and images of local people who have experienced the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and have recovered or who have supported a loved one through recovery to emphasize that most people do recover from COVID-19.
- Also, implementing a “hero” campaign honoring caretakers and healthcare workers who may be stigmatized.
- Community volunteers also play a great role in reducing stigma in communities.

Make sure you portray different ethnic groups

- Ensure that typeface, symbols and formats are neutral and don't suggest any particular group.

Ethical journalism

- Emphasizing efforts to find a vaccine and treatment can increase fear and give the impression that we are powerless to halt infections now. Instead, promote content around basic infection prevention practices, symptoms of COVID-19 and when to seek health care.

Link up

- There are a number of initiatives to address stigma and stereotyping. It is key to link up to these activities to create a movement and a positive environment that shows care and empathy for all.

- **Tips on Communication and Messages**

Misconceptions, rumors and misinformation are contributing to stigma and discrimination which hamper response efforts.

- Correct misconceptions, at the same time as acknowledging that people's feelings and subsequent behavior are very real, even if the underlying assumption is false.
- Promote the importance of prevention, lifesaving actions, early screening and treatment.

Collective solidarity and global cooperation are needed to prevent further transmission and alleviate the concerns of communities.

- Share sympathetic narratives, or stories that humanize the experiences and struggles of individuals or groups affected by the new coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Communicate support and encouragement for those who are on the frontlines of response to this outbreak (health care workers, volunteers, community leaders, etc.).

Facts, not fear will stop the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

- Share facts and accurate information about the disease.
- Challenge myths and stereotypes.
- Choose words carefully. The way we communicate can affect the attitudes of others (see do's and don'ts above).

Reference

- https://www.epi-win.com/sites/epiwin/files/content/attachments/2020-02-24/COVID19%20Stigma%20Guide%2024022020_1.pdf
- World Health Organization
- The United Nations Children's Fund
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent