

PHE network members responding to measles in 2019



 **PHE** Population
Health
Environment
Madagascar Network

Cross-sector responses to COVID-19 Guidance for PHE network members

Introduction

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. It's currently present in more than 200 countries including Madagascar. Governments, businesses, healthcare systems, organisations, communities and households throughout the world are mobilising to respond. PHE network members have a critical role to play and this guidance document offers suggestions of concrete actions that you can take.

COVID-19 overview

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring medical support. Some people will experience no symptoms at all. People over the age of 60 and those with underlying health conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes and chronic respiratory issues are more likely to develop severe illness - occasionally leading to death.

COVID-19 symptoms include:

- New persistent dry cough
- High fever
- Difficulty breathing

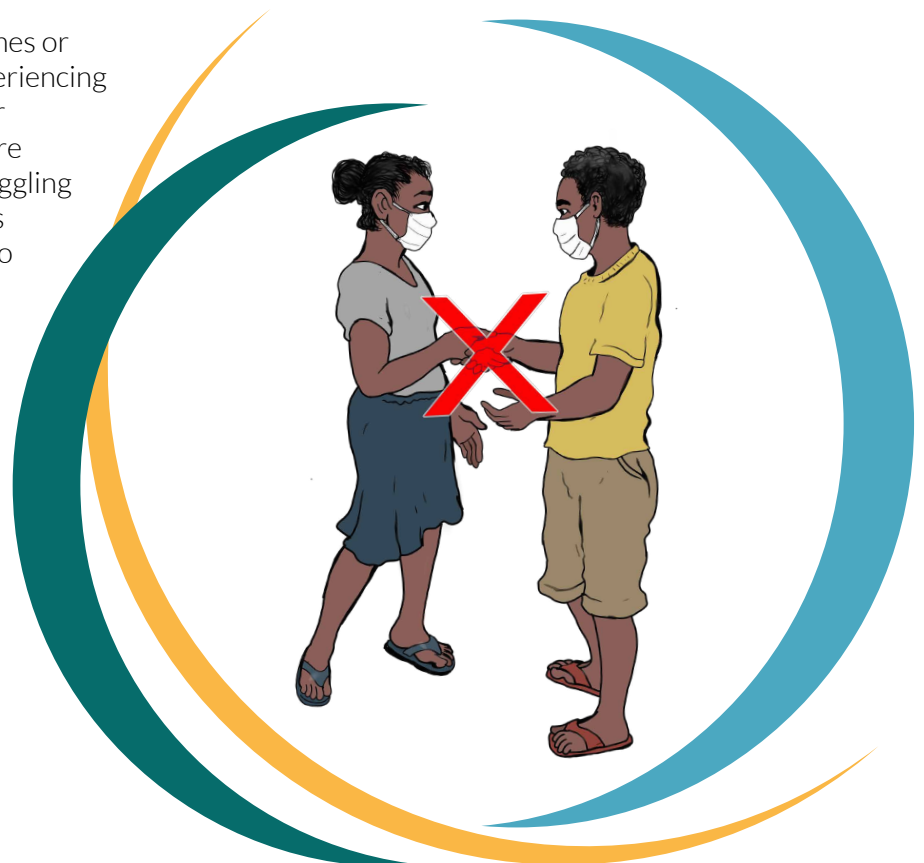
At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. People experiencing severe illness may be offered oxygen or assistance with breathing but healthcare systems throughout the world are struggling to meet the needs of all patients. This is why strong measures are being taken to prevent and slow the transmission of the virus.

COVID-19 spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can survive on a variety of surfaces for several hours or days. This is why basic hygiene practices are so essential.

Simple actions by every individual can help to slow the spread of the disease, reduce pressure on healthcare systems and ultimately save lives.

These actions include:

- Not touching your face
- Not shaking hands with others
- Washing your hands regularly with soap and water
- Covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Staying at home as much as possible
- Avoiding all non-essential travel
- Maintaining a distance of at least 1-2 metres from all people outside of your household (this is known as "social distancing")
- Supporting the most vulnerable - older people, pregnant women and those with underlying health conditions - to shelter at home at all times
- Confining yourself at home (this is known as "self-isolation") with all members of your household for 14 days if anybody develops symptoms - avoiding contact with all others during this time to avoid spreading the virus
- Calling a medical helpline for support if you develop severe illness - not travelling to attend a healthcare facility unless advised / invited by a doctor



How is the PHE network responding to COVID-19?

The PHE network is responding to COVID-19 in a variety of ways:

- ▶ Transmitting high quality information about COVID-19 from the Government of Madagascar to all PHE network members in a timely manner
- ▶ Producing technical guidance and community outreach materials to support robust cross-sector responses to COVID-19 by PHE network members
- ▶ Offering regular webinars for PHE network members to connect, exchange updates and generate ideas for responding to COVID-19 together
- ▶ Tracking the impact of COVID-19 on the operations of PHE network members (health, livelihoods and conservation programming) and communities
- ▶ Tracking cross-sector responses by PHE network members, collating relevant data and stories and learning, preparing to communicate these externally to key stakeholders as appropriate
- ▶ Liaising with the Ministry of Public Health and key health partners to ensure continuity of essential health services including family planning at all PHE partnership sites
- ▶ Tracking responses by humanitarian actors and informing PHE network members about these to enable collaboration as appropriate
- ▶ Adapting our ways of working in line with government advice
 - ▶ Working from home
 - ▶ Migrating to the use of online platforms for all meetings, training and learning exchanges
 - ▶ Advancing key desk-based priorities including data and knowledge management tasks



How can your organisation respond?

PHE network members are uniquely positioned to respond to COVID-19 by supporting Madagascar's most vulnerable rural communities to understand this fast-evolving pandemic, adopt preventative measures early, protect themselves and emerge from this crisis with increased resilience.

Collectively we have experience responding to other infectious diseases in Madagascar including measles and the plague. We have already worked together to strengthen healthcare systems, communication channels and supply chains. We have robust community mobilisation structures in place with highly engaged community health workers, local management committee members and village leaders.

Now is the time to draw on these strengths and mobilise ourselves to respond to this new challenge. Cross-sector PHE partnerships will not only allow us to ensure that communities are fully informed about the virus and understand the key public health actions to take. These partnerships will also enable us to provide 360° support to communities whose livelihoods, food security and ability to engage in natural resource management initiatives are likely to be heavily impacted by COVID-19.

From protecting your own staff to mobilising communities to respond, you may like to consider taking any of the following actions. The PHE network team is here to support and amplify your efforts!

General actions relevant to all organisations

Working practices

- Allow / encourage / instruct staff to work from home wherever possible
- Explore / pilot / implement new ways of connecting teams and holding meetings virtually using online platforms
- Avoid all non-essential travel from urban centres to rural communities with limited access to healthcare

Information sharing

- Share high quality information and guidance about COVID-19 with all staff - official situation and policy updates from the Government of Madagascar will be transmitted to you regularly by the PHE network
- Disseminate public health information and key messages about COVID-19 to communities using methods that model and respect social distancing - official sensitisation materials from the Ministry of Public Health and additional community outreach materials from the PHE network will be shared with you to facilitate these efforts

Where offices / field sites remain open in line with government advice

- Ensure that all desks and equipment are wiped regularly with disinfectant
- Ensure that sanitising alcohol rub or handwashing facilities with soap and water are available, and encourage regular handwashing by all staff
- Minimise in-person meetings and reinforce the importance of social distancing while at work
- Instruct staff to stay at home if they or anyone in their household develops any symptoms

Deeper actions relevant to PHE implementers

Operational coordination

- Liaise with your partners to plan and coordinate actions you can take together
- Reach out to community health workers and vigilance committee members in the communities where you work, confirm that they have received adequate training, identify any capacity gaps or ways that you can support their efforts
- If regular conservation / livelihoods programmes are continuing, identify ways that public health messages could be integrated into these activities
- Cross-train conservation / livelihoods staff to support the community response as appropriate, drawing on existing skill sets wherever possible (e.g. environmental outreach staff could be cross-trained to disseminate basic public health information, ecological data collectors could be cross-trained to assist with symptoms tracking)



Community response

- Print community outreach materials produced by the Ministry of Public Health and PHE network
- Support vigilance committee members, community health workers and conservation / livelihoods staff to:
 - ▶ Disseminate approved public health information in ways that model and respect social distancing (e.g. large well-spaced poster displays near essential food vendors, door-to-door household visits at a distance, radio or megaphone announcements, phone calls or messages)
 - ▶ Reinforce positive social norms around preventative practices, dispel any potential stigma and misconceptions about the disease, provide reminders about necessary public health actions as appropriate
 - ▶ Work with existing community structures (e.g. local management committees, village savings & loans groups, livelihoods groups) to disseminate public health messages
 - ▶ Ensure that all households have access to soap and water for regular handwashing, monitor availability of soap through supply chains
 - ▶ Encourage vulnerable people (those aged over 60 years, pregnant or with underlying health conditions) to shelter at home at all times if this is in line with government advice, ensure that family support systems are in place for food and other essential supplies



- Support emergency transport of severe cases to advanced health facilities if appropriate and feasible

Continuity of essential health services

- Liaise with the Ministry of Public Health and key health partners on continuity / contingency planning for essential health services (LARCs, FP, MCH, PCIMEC, etc) at your PHE partnership site(s) - regular updates on these plans will also be provided to you by the PHE network
- Offer logistical support for medical supply chains and transport of health service providers if appropriate and feasible
- Communicate any anticipated changes in the availability of regular health services to communities in a timely manner

Health system response

- Support vigilance committee members, community health workers and conservation / livelihoods staff to:
 - ▶ Identify and track people with symptoms from a safe distance, feed all relevant data into government systems as requested
 - ▶ Encourage people with symptoms to use national medical helplines, support them and all members of their households to self-isolate in line with government advice
 - ▶ Follow government protocols for community-based management of symptoms, using referral pathways for advanced medical care if needed

Multisector impacts

- Monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on the livelihoods, food security and ability of communities to continue engaging in natural resource management
- Identify existing community structures or new initiatives by humanitarian / private sector actors that can be strengthened to support communities
- Monitor site security, community level cash flows (mobile money, microlending, etc) and availability of essential commodities

- Strengthen existing village savings & loans groups / local management committees, identify ways for them to continue priority activities while respecting social distancing
- Consider providing hardship funds / other social protection through appropriate local community structures with specialist partners
- Liaise with private sector actors to support continued market linkages for essential income-generating products (e.g. seaweed, vegetables, cloves, etc) wherever possible
- Strengthen existing livelihood diversification initiatives to support household resilience to market-based shocks
- Monitor any changes in natural resource use patterns, consider supporting local adaptive management measures as appropriate
- Bearing in mind the potential for increased gender-based / domestic violence due to 'stay at home' orders, raise awareness about national helplines and remote support systems
- Applying a precautionary principle, promoting social distancing and other preventative measures as early as possible
- Protecting and advancing rights in accordance with the PHE quality charter, seeking to ensure continued access to essential health services and specialised support targeted at the most vulnerable
- Mobilising all teams within your organisation, cross-training and redeploying staff in adapted roles if appropriate and feasible
- Collaborating with existing partners and new actors for a truly holistic response, going beyond health to consider livelihoods / conservation / gender impacts

Guiding principles

The actions listed above represent a menu of suggestions that each organisation can choose from based on their capacity, context and community needs. This list may be updated as the pandemic progresses and further best practices emerge. Please share your experiences with the PHE network team so that we can document these for other network members to learn from.

We also offer some broad guiding principles to inform this work:

- Prioritising health & safety of staff at all times, engaging with partners and communities in ways that respect social distancing and minimise the risk of transmission
- Completing rapid situation and stakeholder analyses using remote communications (phone calls, messages, emails) to inform your response
- Aligning actions with government advice, ensuring that only official / validated community outreach materials are used for public health messaging



Tracking our contributions, sharing learning and experiences

The PHE network team will be collating some basic quantitative and qualitative data from network members throughout this crisis in order to capture the contribution of a PHE approach in responding to the multi-dimensional challenges faced by communities due to COVID-19.

We encourage all network members to start tracking the following metrics now:

- Number of community members / staff / CHWs trained to respond
- Number of outreach materials displayed / disseminated
- Number of outreach activities (e.g. household conversations) completed
- Number of presumed cases tracked and supported to self-isolate
- Number / proportion of regular health service delivery points still active

We also encourage you to collect (in ways that respect social distancing) and share accounts of your organisation's response to COVID-19 including short text updates, testimonies, photos and lessons learned reports.

This will enable us to document the value of a cross-sector approach in responding to this crisis, collate learning and promote high impact practices that support community resilience - not only saving lives but also strengthening livelihoods and continuing to conserve ecosystems throughout this public health emergency.

Thank you for your participation and "bon courage"!





Women and children march to participate in a tree-planting initiative in a time before COVID-19



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