COVID-19
A guide to public health in urban, informal settlements

Purpose:

This is a guidance document for people working on public health in informal settlements and urban contexts, as they explore a meaningful response to Covid-19.

Contexts and country-level scenarios vary so please make sure your analysis and thinking is in line with your government’s directives.

What is Covid-19?
Covid-19 is a new disease caused by a coronavirus. It is from the same family of coronaviruses as SARS and MERS. There are about 7 types of coronavirus. The virus causing Covid-19 is thought to originate from Wuhan in China, possibly from bats being sold in a local market.

How is it spread?
The virus is spread through the air in tiny droplets, by coughing, sneezing and spitting, and also through touching surfaces which have been contaminated by the virus. The virus can last on surfaces for up to 3 days.

What are the symptoms of Covid-19?

- Cough
- Fever
- Shortness of breath
Who is vulnerable to catching Covid-19?

Anyone can catch Covid-19: the young and the old, those who are fit and healthy, and those who have underlying health conditions.

The vast majority of people have very mild symptoms when they contract this virus. Some people may not even have symptoms when they have the virus, but they could still pass the virus on to others.

This is a new virus, so there are still a lot of things that are unknown. Individuals who are elderly or have underlying health issues such as diabetes, existing respiratory diseases, cancers, and those with a low immune system are more vulnerable to experiencing a more serious illness if they contract Covid-19, as the virus significantly affects the lungs.

For countries with a high prevalence of HIV there are still many unknowns, but at present the observations are that if you are taking HIV medications regularly then you are at no greater risk than anyone else of experiencing a serious illness if you contract Covid-19.

### Treatment

The majority of people infected with Covid-19 will have mild symptoms. The main recommended treatments are to:\n
- Ensure you keep up your fluids by drinking water
- Ensure you eat and have access to a variety of food
- Rest

**Plan ahead** and ask others to bring you food so that you don’t have to travel and come into contact with others where you might spread the infection.

If you smoke or drink it’s **advisable to stop** as this will help your immune system to fight the virus.

If you have a fever and you have access to **paracetamol** then take it. Otherwise use **cold compresses** (towels with cold water) to bring your temperature down, and open windows to let **fresh air** in.

There are no direct treatments available for Covid-19. A small percentage of people may develop bacterial pneumonia and have severe difficulty breathing, and may require **antibiotics**. However the vast majority of people will not need antibiotics and will recover with **rest at home**.

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1 ARISE - Interview with Tom Wingfield of Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in the UK 21st March 2020
http://www.ariseconsortium.org/
Reliable information sources:

There is a lot of false information being spread about Covid-19. It is important to listen to reliable information sources and not listen to rumours. Look out for information coming from your local health ministry and government, and to the public health messaging being shared about handwashing and social distancing.

Mental health

This is a stressful time for everyone - it is natural to feel worry, fear or anxiety. There will be some people in your community who are more vulnerable to stress, such as the elderly, children and teenagers, and those with existing mental health issues. It is really important to support those people and keep in contact through phone calls.

It is really important to take care of your body during this time. Try and continue to do some exercise if possible, and get fresh air where you can.

It’s also really important to communicate - tell people how you feel. If you are a parent, your children’s stress and anxiety levels will mirror your own stress and anxiety levels. Think about how you can share information with children in a way that they can understand and cope with. Knowledge is empowering and can help children understand what is going on and reduce their anxiety.

Community networks

Community networks are critical in ensuring that clear, trustworthy messages are being shared with all members of the community. Make sure those in the community who might not be visible or active in community groups are included, and that they understand the facts about Covid-19 and what actions they can take to look after themselves and others.

Take responsibility for one another. It is important to recognise that an individual's actions can have an impact on others.

Contact information

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