

## **UPDATE**

# **Guidance on Managing Risk Related to Coronavirus/Covid19**

Current as of: 16 March 2020

### **1. Covid-19/Corona Virus Explained**

There are a number of 'corona' viruses that have affected humans over recent years. All come from the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) family of viruses. Some may remember the 'SARS' virus from a few years ago which also originated in China and MERS which originated in the Arabian Peninsula. This current virus strain is officially called SARS-Corona Virus-2, or SARS-Covid-2. This has been abbreviated to Covid-19 (as it was first identified in 2019).

Note: The World Health Organization (WHO) has now declared the Covid-19 virus to be a global pandemic.

### **2. Virus Transmission**

The exact origin of Covid-19 is unconfirmed, but similar to SARS, it is believed to have come from a family of virus common in bats that had mutated to affect dogs, raccoons, ferrets and civets. Also similar to SARS, this virus mutated enough to make the cross to humans. Within a short period of time the infections changed from animal-to-human to human-to-human transmission.

The virus is transmitted only through contact with mucus membranes...your eyes, nose, mouth. The virus particles can be inhaled if someone coughs or sneezes within 2 meters, or if you touch an infected surface and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

While there are no absolute figures yet, it is suspected the virus can remain alive on a surface for several hours.

### **3. Threat Analysis**

As of the time of writing there are 170,000 reported cases of the virus globally with just over 6500 deaths. Over 77,000 people who were confirmed as having Covid-19 have recovered (*based on figures from John Hopkins CSSE, WHO, CDC, ECDC, NHC and DXY*).

- The challenge presented by Covid19 is that it typically has an incubation period (the time from when you catch the virus until you show some symptoms and realize you have it) of 3-7 days, although it may extend as far as 14 days. During this period you may not realize you have the virus and can infect other people.
- While the virus has a (relatively) low fatality rate and most likely will not prove serious in most healthy adults, if you unknowingly infect those over 50 years, or those with weak immune systems or prior respiratory illness, the risk can become severe. Those 65 and over face the highest risk. Therefore, taking precautions to prevent the spread to the world's most vulnerable requires serious effort.
- An additional threat is to aid workers responding to the Covid-19 virus in communities may occur where there are high levels of suspicion or conspiracy theories related to the virus. We have seen similar sometimes violent responses with other epidemics such as Ebola.
- At time of writing, most aid organizations have suspended non-essential travel, workshops, conferences or community mobilizations. ACT members who do choose to travel must be aware that should they catch Covid-19, or even be suspected of being exposed to a carrier, they may face isolation for up to two weeks.
- Travel in crowded public transport is a major risk, leading to many organizations instituting a temporary work from home policy for those who have to travel on public transport to work.
- One other threat that is a by-product of the virus is the social unrest and stress it is placing on societies. In some areas, hoarding has begun, media is feeding public fear and people are being made to feel helpless and in some cases terrified. This could lead to areas of civil unrest, increased crime and other safety and security challenges.

#### **4. Prevention and Cure**

Currently there is NO cure or vaccination available for Covid19 and the effort to produce one will likely take up to two years.

**Masks:** Masks will not prevent you from getting the virus but if you are a carrier they can prevent you sneezing or coughing and infecting others.

**Hands:** This is the best form of prevention...constant washing/disinfecting of hands. Wearing gloves does not help as the outer surface of the gloves can also carry the virus.

Isolation Governments around the world are instigating 'social distancing' policies intended to reduce the spread of the virus. It is strongly recommended all ACT member staff self-isolate to a degree, avoid crowded public spaces, and take precautions if visiting anyone over 65 years or with any health issues that may make them more vulnerable.

## **5. Virus Symptoms**

While some people may be carriers of the virus and never show any symptoms, for most the virus will appear as a typical flu. Symptoms are typically:

- Fever, aches and pains
- Tiredness
- Nasal congestion
- Coughing or sneezing, dry throat
- Pneumonia-like symptoms and possible difficulty breathing.

It is also strongly advisable that if you are beginning to feel cold/flu-like symptoms do not go straight to a hospital, clinic or pharmacy. Call the nearest hospital and ask for advice. Hospitals and other health agencies are closing their doors to non-life threatening cases to prevent the spread of the virus to those who already face health threats. Only if you begin to experience difficulty breathing should you go straight to the hospital. Follow the advice of local authorities as to whether you should get tested for Covid-19 if you are not having difficulty breathing.

## **6. ACT Member Activities**

The ASG members have been sharing advisories and contacting other agencies for their advice and best practice around the Covid19 issue. Each organization must consider:

Do No Harm: Take measures to not place communities we work with at an increased level of risk through our programming activities

Duty of Care: Put in place measures to ensure staff health and safety and reduce the chance of exposure to the virus or spread to other staff.

Business Continuity: The presence of the Covid19 virus only complicates the valuable work we do around the world as an alliance. Climate change, gender issues, peace and security and all our other member-driven programs need to continue.

## **7. Act Forums**

This is a good opportunity for ACT national forums to come together and support each other. This is especially true where some members may have only small numbers of staff and do not have as many pathways to coping with the challenges presented by the epidemic. Forums are encouraged to stay in contact, develop shared phone trees for mutual support and sharing info/advice. This is especially true for organizations that may have staff in the vulnerable categories.

## **8. Recommendations**

- All ACT members are strongly recommended to conduct a quick risk assessment to understand how the virus could affect your staff, programs and communities.
- Where the virus is known to be present but under control, develop contingency plans for business continuity if the infection rates locally start to climb.
- Where virus is still spreading and considered serious by local authorities consider having staff work from home. Reassess every 14 days or more frequently if the situation warrants.
- Cancel or postpone all local, national or international non-essential travel to locations where the virus is present.
- Identify any staff who have pre-existing medical conditions that may make them more vulnerable. Increased monitoring of their health and wellbeing by line managers/HR.
- Place hand washing stations with disinfectant soap at all office entrances and require staff or visitors to disinfect hands prior to entry. Other stations should be set up at common points in the office and toilets.
- Where the virus infection rates are high, provide visitors with masks for the duration of their visit to protect your staff from infection.
- If staff begin showing symptoms of a cold or flu, either isolate them immediately or ask that they work from home.
- Recommend appointing a team in each office that has all the contact information and advisories for local health authorities with regards to suspected cases.
- Monitor the situation and if not already present, form a Whatsapp group or similar to share information on travel restrictions, government policies or similar regarding containment measures.
- Advice should also be given to family members to prevent transmission to vulnerable family members or the community.

## **9. More Information**

There are a number of good sites to monitor where the virus is present and advice for organizations in managing the risk.

Global mapping of virus:

<https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

Center for Disease Control (CDC) Info Page:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>

## **10. Summary**

Covid-19 will remain an issue and concern for an unknown period. All organizations need to recognize their responsibility both now and in the future to protect their staff, programs and communities. National forums should coordinate in sharing information and best-practice with their local partners and community members. Contingency plans to allow your organization to continue to work should be developed. This may involve increased remote working, reduced community mobilizations and a shift to online training or workshops. It is highly likely that Covid-19 will not be the last infectious virus that challenges our globe and so developing best practice to operating in these conditions becomes key to our future ability to help those that need us most.

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