



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Reducing Stigma

Public health emergencies, such as the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), are stressful times for people and communities. Fear and anxiety about a disease can lead to social *stigma* (1) toward people, places, or things. For example, stigma and discrimination can occur when people associate a disease, such as COVID-19, with a population or nationality, even though not everyone in that population or from that region is specifically at risk for the disease. Stigma can also occur after a person has been released from COVID-19 quarantine even though they are not considered a risk for spreading the virus to others.

Knowing and sharing Facts can help stop stigma

- [Share facts about COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 FAQs](#)

It is important to remember that people – including those of Asian descent – who do not live in or have not recently been in an area of ongoing spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, or have not been in contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 are not at greater risk of spreading COVID-19 than other Americans.

Some groups of people who may be experiencing stigma because of COVID-19 include:

- Persons of Asian descent
- People who have traveled
- Emergency responders or healthcare professionals

Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear or anger towards other people.

Stigmatized groups may be subjected to:

- Social avoidance or rejection
- Denials of healthcare, education, housing or employment
- Physical violence.

Stigma affects the emotional or *mental health* (2) of stigmatized groups and the communities they live in. Stopping stigma is important to making communities and community members *resilient* (3). See [resources on mental health and coping during COVID-19](#).

Everyone can help stop stigma related to COVID-19 by [knowing the facts](#) and sharing them with others in your community.

Communicators and public health officials can help counter stigma during the COVID-19 response.

- Maintain privacy and confidentiality of those seeking healthcare and those who may be part of any contact investigation.
- Quickly communicate the risk or lack of risk from associations with products, people, and places.

- Raise awareness about COVID-19 without increasing fear.
- Share accurate information about how the virus spreads.
- Speak out against negative behaviors, including negative statements on social media about groups of people, or exclusion of people who pose no risk from regular activities.
- Be cautious about the images that are shared. Make sure they do not reinforce stereotypes.
- Engage with stigmatized groups in person and through media channels including news media and social media.
- Thank healthcare workers and responders. People who have traveled to areas where the COVID-19 outbreak is happening to help have performed a valuable service to everyone by helping make sure this disease does not spread further.
- Share the need for social support for people who have returned from China or are worried about friends or relatives in the affected region.

Key Terms

1. **Stigma** occurs when people associate a risk with a specific people, place, or thing – like a minority population group – and there is no evidence that the risk is greater in that group than in the general population. Stigmatization is especially common in disease outbreaks. (https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/cerccorner/article_123016.asp)
2. **Mental health** is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of well being in which a person realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response> [↗](#)).
3. **Resilience** is the ability to withstand and recover from stress. (<https://blogs.cdc.gov/publichealthmatters/2017/08/predicting-community-resilience-and-recovery-after-a-disaster/>)

Other Preparedness Resources

- [Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones](#)
- [Pandemic Preparedness Resources](#)