



Applying humanitarian standards to fight COVID-19

Coronavirus is spreading globally. How can individuals, communities, humanitarian actors, local and national authorities best respond to uphold the rights of all affected people?

Sphere and its partner standards can guide our response

In situations of insecurity with the danger of misinformation and stigmatisation, it is important to understand and apply the most important and basic principles and actions to help limit the spread of the virus.

There are tools from the humanitarian sector that can directly support your COVID-19 response. The sector has been gathering important knowledge and evidence around the response to disease outbreaks, including the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014.

One of the most comprehensive tools is the [Sphere Handbook](#). Sphere and the [Humanitarian Standards Partnership](#) (HSP) contain **standards and guidance** which define the minimum response **all crisis-affected people have the right to expect**. They establish **what needs to be in place** for affected populations to survive and recover with dignity. Sphere standards are directly relevant for a public health emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion chapters being the most important ones.

Our partner standards are equally important, including the **Core Humanitarian Standard** and the following standards which are part of the HSP: **Cash Assistance, Inclusion of older people and people with disabilities, Education in Emergencies, Child Protection** and **Markets and Economic Recovery**.

More importantly, beyond technical advice, the standards provide guidance on the rights of people, information sharing and community engagement:

- a. **Information:** People have the right to understand what is happening and to trust that the measures taken are in their own and the community's best interest. People have the right to clear, transparent and understandable information concerning the outbreak, the actual danger and what is expected of them.
- b. **Dignity:** People are human beings, not just cases. Respecting their human **dignity** is the basis for your response. People who are living with conditions associated with **stigma** or indeed those who fear they may be **stigmatised for having the Coronavirus** can be driven to hide the illness to avoid discrimination. It is important therefore to provide supportive messaging and care.
- c. **Community engagement.** If you want to build trust, share information transparently, involve and include communities directly (including women, children, older people, persons with disabilities and other often excluded groups), listen to them and understand perceptions, social norms and beliefs to avoid the spread of rumours and misinformation.
- d. **Don't forget other needs and others.** Focusing on preventing the spread of the Coronavirus should not make us forget affected people's other needs, nor the long-term needs of the wider population.

How do you do this in a dignified and safe way for affected communities? The technical guidance on the following pages shows you how. It includes links to relevant sections of the various humanitarian standards.

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