

Addressing Social Stigma Associated with COVID-19

Public health emergencies during outbreak of communicable diseases may cause fear and anxiety leading to prejudices against people and communities, social isolation and stigma. Such behavior may culminate into increased hostility, chaos and unnecessary social disruptions.

Cases have been reported of people affected with COVID-19 as well as healthcare workers, sanitary workers and police, who are in the frontline for management of the outbreak, facing discrimination on account of heightened fear and misinformation about infection. Even those who have recovered from COVID-19 face such discrimination. Further, certain communities and areas are being labeled purely based on false reports floating in social media and elsewhere.

There is an urgent need to counter such prejudices and to rise as a community that is empowered with health literacy and responds appropriately in the face of this adversity.

In this regard, all responsible citizens are advised to understand that:

- Although COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease which spreads fast and can infect any one of us, we can protect ourselves through social distancing, washing our hands regularly and following sneezing / coughing etiquettes.
- Despite all precautions, if anybody catches the infection, it is not their fault. In situation of distress, the patient and the family need support and cooperation. It must be noted that the condition is curable and most people recover from it.
- Healthcare workers including doctors, nurses, and allied & healthcare professionals are rendering their services tirelessly to provide care and medical / clinical support in this situation of crisis. Sanitary workers and police are also doing selfless service and playing critical roles in addressing the challenge of COVID-19. They all deserve our support, praise and appreciation.

- All those directly involved in the management of COVID-19 are equipped with appropriate protective equipment to keep them safe from the infection.
- Targeting essential services providers and their families will weaken our fight against COVID-19 and can prove grievously detrimental for the entire nation.

As responsible citizens, we must observe following Do's and Don'ts:

Dos

- Appreciate efforts of people providing essential services and be supportive towards them and their families.
- Share only the authentic information available on the website of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India or the World Health Organisation.
- Cross check any information related to CoVID-19 from reliable sources before forwarding any messages on social media.
- Share positive stories of those who have recovered from COVID-19.

Don'ts

- Never spread names or identity of those affected or under quarantine or their locality on the social media.
- Avoid spreading fear and panic.
- Do not target healthcare and sanitary workers or police. They are there to help you.
- Do not label any community or area for spread of COVID-19.
- Avoid addressing those under treatment as COVID victims. Address them as "people recovering from COVID".