

COVID-19: Key Messages for Refugees in Uganda

With the lockdown being partially lifted, can refugees now travel outside / into Uganda?

No. Uganda continues to maintain a temporary ban to the entry and exit of foreign nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers, to prevent the spread of COVID-19. All official border entry points remain closed. For your own safety, please do not plan any travel outside of Uganda until the travel ban is lifted.

Can refugees travel within Uganda?

On 25 March 2020, the Office of the Prime Minister suspended movement of refugees in between settlements. While the ban on public transport was lifted in non-border districts provided that social distancing measures are observed, the ban remains in place in border districts, including most districts where refugee settlements are located (Yumbe, Koboko, Obongi, Arua, Lamwo, Adjumani, Kikuube, Isingiro). Bodaboda taxis continue to be suspended across the country. We caution you to continue to avoid non-essential movements as the risks of COVID-19 persists.

When are schools and other public places opening?

In light of the number of COVID-19 cases on the rise, the government has decided to extend closure of schools and places of worship until further notice. Workplaces and restaurants are allowed to operate, provided that they strictly observe all the preventive measures. The ban on huge public gathering will remain enforced until further notice. Bars, clubs, salons and spas will remain closed until further notice. Nighttime curfew starting from 7:00 pm to 6:30 am has been extended for another 21 days. Please avoid traveling between these hours.

Do refugees need to continue to observe preventive measures?

Yes. The lifting of lockdown does not mean the COVID-19 pandemic is over. As the number of cases are on the rise in Uganda, it is very important for refugees to continue observing all preventive measures, including, handwashing, restrictions on large gatherings, social distancing, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. The risks of COVID-19 have not gone away, and we continue to be at risk of contracting COVID-19 if we do not follow such measures.

Do refugees need to wear face masks?

Yes. According to the Presidential Directive, all people in Uganda (including refugees) above the age of six must wear face masks when they go outside of their homes. COVID-19 is spread through sneezing, coughing, talking and breathing. When an infected person wears a face mask, the mask blocks the virus from spreading through sneezing, coughing, talking and breathing. The mask also prevents droplets from an infected person reaching the nose and mouth of the person wearing it. The mask only complements and does not remove the need for other precautionary measures, such as periodic hand washing, social distancing, and avoiding touching the mouth, eyes and the nose.

What type of masks should be used by the community?

Community members who are not health workers should use masks made out of fabrics. The Ministry of Health has advised to use two-layered cotton masks, with a pouch between the two layers to place a filter which may be tissue, toilet paper or polypropylene (the material often used for non-plastic shopping bags) to improve the protectiveness of the mask. The mask should be wide enough to cover the nose, mouth and the chin.

How do I use the mask?

Before putting on the mask, make sure your hands are clean. Ensure the mask covers the nose, mouth and chin when wearing it. Avoid touching the front and inner sides of the mask. Wash hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer whenever one touches the front or inside of the mask. After use, make sure to wash the mask and to hang it somewhere where it is safe to dry. Keep the mask hanged in a clean area or in a clean envelope / container when not wearing it.

For more information and reporting COVID-19 symptoms:

Call the Ministry of Health toll free line on: 0800 100066, 0800 203033 or send a free SMS to Ureport on 8500.

For general inquiries: call the inter-agency (FRRM) helpline number: 0800 323232