

Key messages on Coronavirus (COVID-19) for IDPs and staff based on Ministry of Health and Environment instructions – informal sites

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Q: What is currently happening?

A: On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization reported the outbreak of Coronavirus, which causes the disease COVID-19. The first confirmed case of Corona Virus was recorded in Iraq on 24 February 2020, in the city of Najaf, Najaf governorate. Four more cases were reported in Kirkuk governorate on 25 February and one additional case was confirmed in Baghdad on 27 February. As of 25 March, the total number of cases is: 354, distributed across the country, with 29 associated deaths. Consequently, in line with the instructions of the Ministry of Health and Environment in Baghdad, the humanitarian community recommends several measures that must be taken.

Movement and service delivery

Q: What are the movement recommendations for informal sites?

A: The Ministry of Health issued a directive on 25 February on preventative measures to be taken for COVID-19 in formal camps in Iraq, which included a recommendation to limit movement of people moving in and out of camps to only urgent needs. Since then, the Government of Iraq has issued restriction on movement of people across Iraq and a curfew to reduce risk of spread of the virus. The following Ministry of Health recommendations for formal camps are also useful for informal sites, as a temporary measure, where people moving in, out, and around the site could place residents at risk of catching and spreading the virus:

- Recommendations on movement restriction in and out of the site, as follows:
 - o Resident individuals are recommended not to leave the site except for urgent needs. These are outlined below.
 - o Resident individuals are encouraged to minimize or completely stop inviting people from outside the site. Aid workers delivering essential services are an exemption to this since they need to continue providing assistance, but should ensure to keep a 1 meter (3 feet) distance from residents and practice very good hygiene and handwashing practices.
- Gathering of people in larger groups should be on hold, even during distribution of aid, for people's own protection.

Q: What is considered an urgent need?

A: In case a member of the family needs to leave the IDP informal site, it is recommended to follow the preventive measures defined by WHO (see in page 3 of this document). Urgent needs will be defined and decided by local authorities, and might change. Examples of them might include:

- Any health emergency or access to another life-saving service
- Urgent family visit or reunification
- Important meeting with/summons by authorities

Please speak to the camp manager about the specifics of your case. Any ultimate decision will likely be taken by the local authorities.

Q: What are not considered priorities?

A: In order to remain cautious and minimize the possibility of carrying any infection into the site, it is recommended, temporarily, to consider as non-urgent needs:

- Frequently buying groceries outside of the site (limit number of trips to local markets, and use food rations where provided).
- Regular family and friend visits are not considered a priority.
- Gathering in groups outside dwelling places even within the site

Q: Who can continue accessing the site?

A:

- All registered site residents
- All registered service providers
- All the humanitarian actors already working in the location

Q: Will this affect the services in the informal site?

A: In order to reduce likelihood of spread of the virus, some humanitarian services are closed or reduced at the moment, to avoid large gatherings of people and to reduce the number of people traveling between and within towns in Iraq:

- Formal primary and secondary schools and universities in country have been closed temporarily by order of the Directorate of Education, as large gatherings should be limited.
- Some non-essential services have been stopped, to minimize gatherings of people and minimize the number of humanitarian service providers traveling round to limit the possibility of spread of the virus
- Essential services will be continued, while minimizing gatherings of people while receiving assistance. Availability of basic services will follow the guidance from the Ministry of Health and Environment as well as Ministry of Displacement and Migration.

Q: Why are (some) humanitarian workers wearing face masks?

A: Healthy people wear a mask if they are coughing or sneezing to minimize the chance of infecting others. Some humanitarian workers choose to wear masks to protect members of the community, because humanitarians are coming from outside the site. This measure is to keep a safe and healthy environment inside the site. In addition, there may be some people in the site who may have flu-like symptoms; since aid workers also have families and meet other people, they want to make sure they stay healthy and well, too.

Q: How long will these measures remain in place?

A: These changes are linked to the government instructions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. These measures are protective and to ensure people's safety; the government will keep monitoring the situation and updating the precaution measures accordingly.

What if someone might have COVID-19?

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: Some people who have the coronavirus, which causes COVID-19, will have no symptoms. Some people will have mild symptoms, and some will have serious symptoms. The symptoms are like flu. The most common symptoms are fever, cough, and fatigue (tiredness). Other less common symptoms include aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea.

Q: What if you suspect that someone in the site might have COVID-19?

A:

- If you suspect that there might be a person having the virus (showing flu-like symptoms), inform your local healthcare provider immediately, or in its absence the mobile CCCM team. However, if neither of these are available, you may call the hotline number for your governorate (123 for Federal Iraq and 122 for Kurdistan Region)
- Maintain social distancing between yourself and anyone who is coughing/ sneezing (minimum 1 meter, 3 feet), running a temperature and/or showing signs of being ill.
- If you have been in contact with a person who might have COVID-19, or who is showing flu or common cold-like symptoms, inform the local healthcare provider by phone (so they are prepared to receive you) before visiting the health facility. In the absence of a static or public Primary Health Center, you may contact the mobile CCCM team.
- Anyone who has been in contact with someone who might have COVID-19 should self-isolate themselves either until the case is confirmed as negative or for 14 days if confirmed as positive.
- At all times, practice hygiene methods which are detailed below under “General Health Messages”
- Please, do not spread unverified information about friends, relatives, or neighbors who might have COVID-10. Rumors can unnecessarily create anxiety and can result in stigma and discrimination against individual people. Health actors and local authorities will inform about confirmed cases in the area.

Q: What if I believe I might have COVID-19?

A: If you suspect that you might have COVID-19 (showing flu-like symptoms with contact with someone who has symptoms or with a travel history to any of the affected countries), please:

- Self-isolate yourself in your tent or house,
- Inform the local healthcare provider immediately. In its absence, the mobile CCCM team can be reached by phone. If none of these are available, call the government hotline number, based on your location (123 for Federal Iraq and 122 for Kurdistan Region).
- In case you cannot inform them by phone, request a friend or relative to inform for you
- Continue maintaining good hygiene practice until health assistance arrives
- Tell your family members and anyone you have been in close contact with, so they can self-isolate themselves also to avoid possibly spreading the virus further. Anyone who has been in contact with someone who might have COVID-19 should self-isolate themselves either until the test is confirmed as negative or for 14 days if confirmed as positive.
- If you use shared WASH facilities, then wash your hands with soap and water BEFORE and AFTER use, and make sure to clean any items or surfaces you touch— including door handles, locks, and taps. The virus can be spread by touching surfaces, but it is killed by soap.

Q: What if I have been in close contact with someone who might have COVID-19?

A: Anyone who has been in close contact with someone who might have COVID-19 should self-isolate themselves until either their test is confirmed as negative, or for 14 days if their test is positive, to avoid possibly spreading the virus further.

- Self-isolation means you must stay inside your tent or house, and not have any contact with other people, as far as is possible. Try to stay in a separate room to your family members, or at least keep a 1 metre (3 feet) distance from them. You should not visit the market, attend distributions, or meet friends, family, or other members of the community.
- If it is confirmed that the person you have been in close contact with has COVID-19, then you should remain in self-isolation for 14 days. This is the length of time that it might take to show symptoms, if you have also caught the virus. Even if you feel well, it is possible that you might still be able to spread the virus – taking a responsible action of self-isolation means you will not accidentally spread it to other people too.
- If you use shared water points, latrines, and showers, then wash your hands with soap and water BEFORE and AFTER use, and make sure to clean any items or surfaces you touch— including door handles, locks, and taps. The virus can be spread by touching surfaces, but it is killed by soap.
- If you need food from the market, ask a family member or neighbor to collect the items to deliver to you – but they must remain at least 1 meter (3 feet) away from you when they bring the items

- If distributions are taking place during this time, then contact the distribution provider or mobile CCCM team who will make sure you are included in the distribution. Do not attend the distribution site in person.
- If you develop symptoms, then follow the process to inform the local healthcare provider

General health messages

Q: What prevention methods can I take myself?

A:

- ✓ **Wash your hands frequently:** Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Wash your hands:
 - after coughing or sneezing
 - when caring for the sick
 - before, during and after you prepare food
 - before eating
 - before using communal water points, latrines, and showers
 - after using water points, latrines, and showers
 - when hands are visible dirty
 - after handling animals or animal waste
 - On a regular basis, regardless of what activities you have been doing

Why? Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub removes and kills viruses that may be contaminated from the surfaces on your hands. Even during regular, everyday activities you can touch contaminated objects, and it is good hygiene practice to regularly wash your hands.

- ✓ **Maintain social distancing:** Maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. Avoid close contact when you are experiencing cough and fever. Please bear in mind that surfaces around a sick individual could be contaminated with droplets from sneezing and coughing. Therefore, avoid touching surfaces and wash your hands frequently, even if they are not visibly dirty.

Why? When an infected person coughs or sneezes, they spray small respiratory droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, or the droplets may contaminate your mucous membranes on of nose, mouth and eyes.

- ✓ **Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth**

Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can be contaminated by the viruses that are discharged from an infected person and staying for a while on the surfaces. The contaminated hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

Alcohol-based sanitizers should be used on bare palms and not on gloves. Gloves are not a protection if they are not used correctly, i.e., if you touch your face with gloved hands. Disposable gloves should be discarded as soon as possible within short intervals, particularly if you have done any work that may have dirtied them.

- ✓ **Practice respiratory hygiene:** When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue. Then throw tissue into closed bin immediately after use. Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub afterwards. Avoid spitting in public.

- ✓ If using masks, make sure that they are not to be touched or reused after eating or since they get contaminated as soon as you touch or remove them. As much as possible, try to dispose the one you have discarded (particularly if it has become damp) and use a new one, using the appropriate measures

Why? Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

- ✓ **Practice food safety:** Use different chopping boards and knives for raw meat and cooked foods. Wash your hands between handling raw and cooked food. Sick animals and animals that have died of diseases should not be eaten. Even in areas experiencing outbreaks, meat products can be safely consumed if these items are cooked thoroughly and properly handled during food preparation.

Why? There is a hypothesis that the virus originated in humans through contaminated animal products. The virus is killed by high temperatures, so thoroughly cooking meat will help protect you from infection.

- ✓ **Seek medical care:** If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early.

Why? Seeking medical care early will prevent you from spreading the disease to others and allow you to receive treatment for your symptoms more quickly.

Q: Are antibiotics effective in preventing and treating the new coronavirus?

A: No, antibiotics do not work against viruses, only bacteria. The new coronavirus is a virus and, therefore, antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment.

Q: Can spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body kill the new coronavirus?

A: No. Spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body will not kill viruses that have already entered your body. Spraying such substances can be harmful to clothes or eyes and mouth. Be aware that both alcohol and chlorine can be useful to disinfect surfaces, but they need to be used under appropriate recommendations.