

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Stigma

Viruses Don't Discriminate, and Neither Should We

Stigma is a strong feeling of disapproval that is often based on unfair judgment or misinformation about a group of people or certain actions or activities. The stress, fear, and anxiety about a disease, like COVID-19, can lead to stigma toward people or places. Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear and anger. Stigmatized people are hurt emotionally and mentally, and may be rejected by others, denied healthcare, education, housing or employment, or even face physical violence. We can all do our part to reduce stigma.



Coronavirus doesn't recognize race, nationality, or ethnicity.

Diseases can make anyone sick regardless of their race or ethnicity. COVID-19 started in China, but that's just geography. Having Chinese ancestry (or any other ancestry) does not make a person more likely to get COVID-19. Likewise, being from a place where people have COVID-19 doesn't mean the person has the disease.



Wearing a mask does not mean a person is ill.

We should not judge someone for wearing a mask or assume they are sick. People wear masks for a variety of reasons, including to avoid pollen and air pollution, for cultural and social reasons, or they may be wearing the mask because they (or someone they care for) are at higher risk for getting sick, and they are trying to protect themselves. They may be a health care worker doing their best to keep everyone safe.



You can interrupt stigma. Start by sharing information that is true.

Know the facts and avoid spreading misinformation. Stay informed through trusted sources like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov), Indian Health Service (IHS.gov), Johns Hopkins University (JHU.edu), etc.



Speak up if you hear, see, or read false information or mistreatment of others.

Gently correct false information, and remind the speaker that speaking badly of others and treating them unkindly makes us all less safe. If serious mistreatment occurs, report it to authorities or call 911.



Show compassion and support for those most closely impacted.

Listen to, acknowledge and, with their consent, share the stories of people experiencing stigma, along with a message that treating people this way is not acceptable in your community. Create learning opportunities for youth and others to identify and correct racist and misinformed ideas.



We're all in this together.

Everyone can do their part to help slow the spread of coronavirus. There are things you can do to help keep yourself and others healthy. Stay home, wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth, and clean and sanitize commonly-touched items in the home frequently. When sick, stay away from others and cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash hands.



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For more information:
[CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)