

GENERAL NOTICE

March 16th 2020

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING #CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)

To: All IHI Staff and Partners,

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus is rapidly spreading across the globe. Starting in Wuhan, China in December, 2019, the virus has now reached pandemic scale, and is now in 121 countries. Over 170,000 people have been confirmed infected at the time of writing this document, and there are potentially many more yet to be diagnosed. Nearly half of all cases have so far been in China, but the World Health Organization (WHO) recently stated that Europe is now the epicenter of the pandemic, with more than 24,000 cases in Italy and a growing number in Germany, Spain, France, UK, Switzerland and other countries. The USA too, already has nearly 3500 cases. The WHO-Africa Region Office in Brazzaville, and the Africa CDC are leading the preparedness against the virus, working with member countries to support rapid diagnostics and infection prevention. So far, Africa has recorded over 280 cases and 6 deaths, in 26 countries. Most cases in Africa are still associated with travel from other regions, although South Africa, Algeria, Egypt and Senegal have also recorded several cases of local transmission from the index cases. In East Africa, Rwanda and Kenya have five and three cases respectively, and there are also cases in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2), and Ethiopia (4). Unfortunately, today the 16th March 2020, the United Republic of Tanzania has confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Arusha.

Other than the rapid spread of the infections and deaths caused, COVID-19 has an extraordinary capacity to overwhelm health systems and disrupt socio-economic activities. Its impact can go far and wide, and the cases will grow exponentially, reaching thousands in a matter of days. Given the gravity of the situation, and in consideration of the known epidemiology of COVID-19 as of now and the situation in other affected regions, it is a responsibility of every individual, every organization and every authority to act decisively and courageously to stop the spread of the virus, and limit its impacts.

WE MUST ACT NOW

IFAKARA HEALTH INSTITUTE, therefore wishes to provide the following information and instructions to all staff and partners. The information provided here is based on the current best knowledge regarding COVID-19, and will be updated regularly. We must act NOW.

1. **Keep yourself informed:** we recommend that you follow authoritative sources of information, primarily the World Health Organization [updates on COVID-19](#): This page provides updates on the latest trends, and also up-to-date information on how to protect yourself, your family, friends, and workmates. Please also follow the guidelines issued by the Tanzanian Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly & Children. Other sources of information include the Johns Hopkins Center [Coronavirus Resource Centre](#) and the Africa CDC [emergency updates](#). The Johns Hopkins centre also has an excellent interactive [dashboard](#)

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tracking COVID-19 cases globally. Another highly informative site is <https://ncov2019.live/data>, built by a 17-year old Avi Schiffman from Seattle, which also provides sub-national data for certain countries.

2. **IHI-COVID19 Team:** We have established a 16-member **IHI-COVID-19 Preparedness Team**, which will provide constant guidance over the next few months as the COVID-19 situation progresses. The team will also lead all other efforts towards our joint preparedness, in support of the Government of Tanzania. Please refer any questions regarding COVID-19 to the team. The team will be led by Dr. Ally Olotu (Head of Interventions and Clinical Trials department), and can be reached at COVID19@IHI.OR.TZ. Other members of the team include:

1. Sarah Mswata (IHI Laboratories-Bagamoyo)-Deputy to Ally Olotu
2. Faraji Abilahi (IHI Laboratories-Ifakara)
3. Happy Mkali (Infection Biologist),
4. Dr. Grace Mwangoka (Infection Biologist),
5. Solomon Mwakasungula (Infection Biologist),
6. Dr. Getrud Mollel (Global Health Clinician),
7. Dr. Jerry Hella (Clinical Epidemiologist),
8. Lina Finda (Behavioural Scientist)
9. Fredros Okumu (Director of Science)
10. Bilal Aziz (Communications Officer) and
11. Kamilus Masonda (Senior Branch Administrator - Dar es Salaam)
12. Esther Abdul (Administrator, Ifakara Branch)
13. Mariam Karama (Finance Manager, IHI)
14. Adelina Herman (Senior Administrative Officer, Bagamoyo)
15. Cecilia Francis (Administrative Officer, Training Centre, Bagamoyo)

3. **Please stay at home if you have any signs of ill health:** Please inform your line manager immediately if you feel unwell. Important signs and symptoms to watch out for include:

1. Fever
2. Cough
3. Difficulty in breathing

If you have any of these symptoms, please DO NOT IGNORE. Seek Medical Attention Immediately, and follow the directions provided by the local health authority. Staff who experience signs of respiratory illness while at work should immediately wear a mask that covers a mouth and nose and be allowed to go to the hospital or home immediately. The masks will be made available in these situations by the branch administration.

4. **Returning from international travel.** Staff who have recently returned from any international travel are required to notify the IHI-COVID-19 team chairperson, to work from home for at least 14 days, and to constantly monitor their health for any signs of respiratory illness (COVID19@IHI.OR.TZ). If you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly as this may be due to a respiratory infection or other serious condition.

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5. **Essential precautions to prevent contracting or spreading infections:** You are advised to follow these precautions as per the current [WHO guidelines](#)
 1. Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds. Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.
 2. Maintain social distancing: Maintain at least 1 metre distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing
 3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth: Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth.
 4. Practice respiratory hygiene: Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
 5. Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces of the office common areas daily (example tables, chair, door knobs, light switches, remotes, handles (include car door handle), desks, toilets, sinks, phones, keyboard, tap water e.t.c.)
6. **Planning International Travel:** We are actively discouraging any non-essential international travel. Instead, we encourage use of teleconference/video conference platforms in all meetings. Staff members intending to travel abroad between now and April 15th, are required to obtain permission, upon review of their circumstances by the IHI-COVID-19 preparedness team. Written permission must be obtained from Dr. Ally Olotu, or his deputy (COVID19@IHI.OR.TZ). You are advised to seek for permission before incurring travel associated costs i.e., purchasing air tickets and accommodation booking. Should it be necessary for you to travel, avoid contact with sick people, avoid touching your mouth, nose and face with unwashed hands. DO NOT travel if you are unwell.
7. **Hosting International Guests:** You are discouraged from hosting any international collaborators until April 15th 2020. Any staff wishing to invite any collaborators to Tanzania, must also seek written permission from the chairperson through the IHI-COVID-19 preparedness team member situated in respective branches. The team will review the circumstances on a case by case basis.
8. **Staff currently abroad:** Ifakara Health Institute staff currently abroad in extended training are advised to check in with their local line manager and the human resource office (hrm@ihi.or.tz) on a weekly basis, on their situation with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please also inform your line manager and the HR team immediately if you experience any signs of ill health. You should also strictly follow the recommendations from the Health authority of the country you are currently staying and stay informed as recommended. To avoid any risk of infection during travel, we do not currently recommend that the staff return home unless this is unavoidable.
9. **Workplace preparedness:** All administrative officers at all Ifakara Health Institute offices are required to provide a constant supply of the following:

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1. Hand sanitizers (alcohol-based with 60%-95% alcohol); an alternative is 0.05% liquid bleach if hand sanitizers are not available
 2. Disposal receptacles
 3. Soft tissues
 4. Ensure running water at all times and soap
 5. Hand washing guidelines with clear pictures and instructions at multiple locations station
 6. High-levels of hygiene at the Tea and Coffee stations
 7. Clear signs and labels. Administrators should download and print large copies of the [WHO recommended posters](#). These should be placed neatly at strategic locations across IHI campuses. Click on [this page](#), and check under section "Be Ready for Coronavirus"
 8. Face masks, to be used when someone develops symptoms in the office.
 9. Digital thermometers in each office to regularly check for body temperatures of staff coming into the offices.
 10. Staff members are requested to take additional precautions at all times, to prevent surface contamination.
10. **Entering buildings:** All staff are encouraged to frequently wash their hands or clean with alcohol-based hand sanitizers, each time you enter a building or office. Hand sanitizers will be placed at the entry of every building and in all resting areas.
 11. **Work-related meetings:** All meetings with more than 10 persons are discouraged. Meetings must practice social distancing, with participants staying at least 1m apart. Branch Administrators will observe and advise accordingly.
 12. **Working from home:** Ifakara Health Institute is not currently recommending a work-at-home policy, except for staff with ill health, or those who have returned from any international travel in the last 14 days.
 13. **Accurate messaging to extended families, friends and communities:** Provide accurate information to your families, friends and communities. If you have family in the countryside, who are disconnected from mainstream media, you are encouraged to regularly provide them with accurate information concerning COVID-19, and to help dispel any inaccurate information.
 14. **Social Media Use:** IHI staff using social media are required to exercise caution, when communicating about COVID-19. Please take all necessary steps to ensure accuracy and to allay any fears in the community.
 15. **Invitations by mainstream media:** If called to the media to speak about COVID-19, please direct the media persons to Dr. Ally Olotu and team (COVID19@IHI.OR.TZ).
 16. **Preventing stigma:** Ifakara Health Institute exists to improve people's health and wellbeing. We therefore must take care and responsibility for any persons arriving from a COVID-19 affected area, and any persons with signs of ill health. You are requested to act with respect and to avoid any stigma.

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17. **Protection for international collaborators:** Due to the unfortunate perception by the public that COVID-19 is caused by a “foreign” virus transmitted by people from other countries, our international staff and collaborators might face prejudicial treatment in some areas. You are requested to take all necessary steps to protect non-Tanzanian staff and partners. Any cases of phobic utterances or activities must be reported to the branch administration with immediate effect. Similarly, we urge our non-Tanzanian collaborators and staff to remain vigilant, and report their whereabouts regularly.
18. **SARS-CoV-2 Diagnostics for Returning Travelers or Suspected cases:** Our laboratory in Bagamoyo is currently working round-the-clock to establish a primary testing facility in Bagamoyo. Once this is completed and necessary government approvals obtained, we will make the facility available for any suspected cases and returning travelers, to enable quick isolation of infected cases.
19. **Use of Public Transport:** We recognize that most IHI staff, especially in Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo still rely on public transport to come to work. We will be closing offices at 4.00 pm each day to allow staff returning home to avoid crowded buses. Staff members with private travels are also encouraged to offer/share rides with the others where possible.
20. **Information sharing at branch level:** Senior Administrators at all branches, and in Dar es Salaam will hold meetings with the teams to share this information and answer any questions. To avoid large gatherings, the meetings will be held with individual groups and small teams
21. **Further information on COVID19** while in Tanzania can be obtained through toll free numbers **0800110124** and **0800110125**.

NOTE: This document will be updated regularly

Approved for release by:



Dr. Ally Olotu

Team Leader, Ifakara COVID-19 Preparedness

March 16, 2020,
Bagamoyo



Dr. Honorati Masanja

Chief Executive Director, IHI

March 16, 2020,
Dar es Salaam