

# COMMUNITY GUIDE



## How do we address the COVID-19 crisis?<sup>1</sup>

Considerations for indigenous organizations and communities in response to COVID-19<sup>2</sup>



This document summarizes some of the actions the indigenous peoples of Latin America have taken to confront COVID-19. Its aim is to support the communities and their authorities in making decisions and implementing measures to prevent and contain the virus within the context of their community structures and governance mechanisms.

1. In the worldview of many indigenous peoples, saying the disease name summons it. Therefore, this guide does not expressly reference COVID-19, instead calling it "the virus."

2. The considerations noted in this document apply to indigenous peoples in both rural and urban contexts, as well as Afro-descendant and traditional communities.



# What is COVID-19?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a worldwide outbreak of an infectious virus (COVID-19) appeared in December 2019. The virus passes from person to person through invisible droplets emitted from the nose or mouth *when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks*. These droplets can travel up to two meters through the air, then they fall, and remain on objects and nearby people. If people breathe in these droplets or touch objects where they have settled and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth, they can be infected with the virus and fall ill. **Handwashing and maintaining distance between people (two arms' lengths or two meters) is the best way for people to protect themselves from this disease.**

**People with fever, cough, and shortness of breath should seek immediate medical attention.**



**The most common symptoms of the virus are fever, fatigue, and dry cough.**

Some people may have pain, congestion, a runny nose, a sore throat, or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and appear sequentially. Some people become infected but exhibit no symptoms or discomfort. Most recover from the disease without the need for special treatment. About one in six people who get the virus develops a serious illness and has trouble breathing. **The elderly and those with previous illnesses such as high blood pressure, heart problems, or diabetes are more likely to become seriously ill. These are the most vulnerable people.**



# How can you get information about the virus?

People should seek **information only from official sources** in order to ensure that it is correct. **Official information** is that provided by governments, WHO, or the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Official information is reliable. Information from other sources may be incorrect, mislead the population, or generate fear.

**Request guidance from the nearest health center or local governments.** People can also call the national phone numbers or WhatsApp contacts that many countries have established to provide virus information. It is best to trust community health providers such as promoters, assistants, nurses, and doctors, as they can best convey credible and trustworthy information about this virus.



**Take advantage of the technological knowledge and solidarity of indigenous youth** inside and outside the community. Many young people know how to use the Internet and can search for **official information** from the reliable sources mentioned above (national government, Ministry of Health, PAHO, and WHO) and share it with the community. Furthermore, young people know how to make audio and video recordings and can translate **official information** into indigenous languages for dissemination within communities. It is important to **circulate** only **official information** and not spread false information that can mislead the community or create confusion or fear.

**Request official information from indigenous authorities within the government and from indigenous organizations** that represent their communities. Indigenous organizations at the local, national, or international level are centralizing official information and translating it into indigenous languages to create easily accessible prevention information (audio, video, songs, radio programs, social media campaigns, posters, infographics, WhatsApp messaging, etc.).





# How can you protect the community from virus exposure?

## **Strengthen community organization specifically to confront the virus.**

An emergency committee can be established to prepare and coordinate community actions. Such coordination should involve a limited number of people and young volunteers and include the perspectives of women, and always seek to apply the health authorities' recommendations (social distancing, disinfection, constant hand washing, and protection of those who are most vulnerable).

**Create a “protective fence”** to control entry and exit to the community in coordination with local authorities (local government, police, etc.). To strengthen the implementation of the “protective fence”, it is important to coordinate with government authorities the mobilizing of the people who handle community security at the entrance and borders of the communities and territories (volunteer guards, community police, watchmen, cultural mediators, etc.). These community members should be supported through community contributions of food for their families or other types of incentives in order to help them carry out their work. Some communities have assigned shifts to each parent in the community to redistribute responsibilities.

## **Control the return of people living outside the community.**

Some communities have required that returning people or families be quarantined, wherein they are isolated for at least 14 days. (Quarantine details are explained below.)







**Control the entry** of suppliers or intermediaries for food purchase and sale. Some options include:

- Creating a small committee, preferably of young people, who are the only ones who connect with outsiders such as intermediaries involved in food purchase or sale, government agents, etc.
- Establishing a sanitary protocol that defines rules for food suppliers, donors, and community liaisons to control social distancing, exchange coordination at designated points, disinfection, hand sanitation, covering of the nose and mouth, etc. Coordinating with health authorities to implement the national health protocol, taking into account the characteristics of each community, so as to limit the number of people in direct contact with people outside the community.
- Closing the entrance to the community to suppliers or intermediaries, as some communities have done.

For public donations and aid, **closely coordinate with public sector authorities** on deliveries of products and services (food, vouchers, sanitary products for transmission prevention, etc.) in order to establish distribution mechanism and prevent crowding during deliveries.





## How can you carry out the necessary social distancing and isolation to prevent the spread of the virus in the community?



**Avoid large groups of people**, since the risk of contagion is greater in groups, and suspend all meetings, including local or regional conferences, community meetings, spiritual meetings, sports activities, parties, baptisms, first communions, weddings, birthdays, classes, ceremonies and rituals, trips, and exchanges between communities.

**Control food purchases** to prevent large groups and closeness between people, including by: distancing vendors, establishing distant supply points, assigning shifts and schedules for buyers, agreeing on exclusive schedules for older adults' access, and ordering and limiting the number of people who can enter stores (one by one) and the distance between them in line (two meters).



**Constantly inform people about the importance of maintaining at least two meters of distance**

between them at all times. Within households where many people live, it may be difficult to keep this distance. Nevertheless, apply this principle to the extent possible to reduce contagion, especially to elderly and ill household members who are most vulnerable to the virus, as described above.

**Apply social distancing and isolation between people from different houses**

so that people in one house do not interact with people in other houses. Children should only play with the children who live in their home. People should only go out with people from their home, and should not visit other houses or communities. If there is no visiting, the possibility of contagion within and amongst communities is reduced.

**Reduce the size of groups of people**

who work in agriculture, livestock management, fishing, hunting, and other activities typical of community life. Where collective work is unavoidable, encourage community members to work with members of their own households to reduce the possibility of contagion.

**Mobilize community guards,**

watchmen, and traditional authorities to increase surveillance within the community and ensure compliance with community health measures.





# How can a quarantine be applied to a person or family in the community?

There are **two types of quarantine**:

- Quarantine (or confinement) **WITH outings**, established by the national government, obliges all families in the country to stay at home, with the exception of leaving to purchase food and medicine, to seek medical care, or to carry out essential work.
- Quarantine **WITHOUT outings** is mandatory and prohibits leaving isolation or having physical contact with other people for at least 14 days. This quarantine is recommended in the following instances:
  - When someone has been in direct contact with an infected person
  - When someone has symptoms associated with the virus (fever, dry cough, weakness, and difficulty breathing)
  - When a person or a family migrates back to the community from living elsewhere.

People or families quarantined should be isolated for 14 days and should not have physical contact with anyone other than health personnel. If during the 14 days the people in quarantine have symptoms such as cough, fever, fatigue, or shortness of breath, **the nearest health service should be contacted immediately**. People confirmed positive for the virus should follow doctors' instructions. If after 14 days the quarantined people do not have symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, fatigue), they can end the quarantine period **WITHOUT** exit and maintain the social distancing measures.

To carry out the quarantine, **an isolation space is required for the affected person or family**. Some communities have assigned or built a detached house for the quarantine of a person or family. This area can be posted with signs to prevent others from entering.

In turn, it is necessary to ensure that quarantined people **are supplied with food and can wash their dishes and clothes** with soap, detergent, or other cleaning materials. Distance and disinfection measures must be maintained during delivery of products to people in quarantine. Supplies should be left at a distance of several meters, then those doing the delivery should withdraw and let the quarantined people collect the supplies.





# What should be done if someone in the community is suspected of having the virus?

First, it is important to contact health authorities before a case arises in order to **learn about the virus and the steps to take** in case of a suspected case. It is also important to carry out community actions that:

- encourage community members to **report to the authorities** without fear or shame, as this is for their own good and that of their family and community;
- identify the **health authorities with whom to communicate**, including getting telephone numbers, and determine how to communicate if the community does not have a radio, TV, telephone, or cell phone signal;
- indicate the **measures to be taken** in handling the individual or family case and the measures to be taken in the community;
- determine **how an infected person will be transferred** to a different location, if necessary – that is, who will do it and what sanitary protection measures will need to be in place for those transporting the patient.



Community members need **to be aware of the virus symptoms**. If someone has symptoms, designated authorities should be informed to contact medical personnel and activate the necessary care measures. Special attention should be paid to the presence of symptoms **in those who have been out of the community in the last two weeks**, as they could have been exposed to the virus.



# How should households protect themselves against the virus?

**Wash your hands many times a day** with soap and water for 20 seconds or more, especially before cooking or eating, or after having been in a public place, blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

**Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth**, as the virus enters the body through them.

**Strengthen** the **cleaning, washing, and ventilation** of the **home**.

**Use individual cutlery, plates, and cups** and do not share them.

**Reinforce the body's own defenses** with a nutritious diet, adequate rest, and exercise.

**Use face masks** to cover the nose and mouth when leaving the house. If necessary, make them using available materials.

Until the virus is defeated, **avoid handshaking, kissing, hugging**, and **avoid physical closeness** with other people.

**Prevent children from playing** with children from other homes.





# How can the elderly and other especially vulnerable people within a community be protected?



- **Analyze among authority figures** how the elderly will be protected, since they are more at risk of catching the virus and dying from it because their natural defenses are weaker.

- **Avoid contact between the elderly and children and young people**, since the latter can be carriers of the virus without showing symptoms.

- **Encourage young people to carry out certain responsibilities of older people** so that the elderly do not have to leave their homes to do agricultural work, manage livestock, fish, etc.

- **Practice solidarity** in communities in the distribution of food to the most vulnerable families or people.





## How is cleaning and disinfection carried out without soap or disinfectants?

Facilitate public access to these products for those who do not have them in their homes. **Place soap and water points** or buckets of water with a splash of bleach (chlorine) at locations in the community so that everyone can wash and disinfect their hands.

With community elders and leaders, identify **what available local products could be used** to make artisan soap or plant-based disinfectants.

As needed, use items such as **artisan soaps, ash, ash lye, citric acid (lemon), and ethyl alcohol (liquor)** for cleaning and disinfection, though it is recommended to get **disinfecting products** such as chlorine, soap, detergent, hand sanitizer, antiseptic alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, etc.

## How can you maintain spirituality during this period of social distancing and quarantine?

**Carry out spiritual activities within the home** and only with persons who live there, rather than congregating outside the home with many people.

### REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR INDIGENOUS HEALTH PROTECTION

The considerations and actions outlined in this document follow the guidelines and principles established in different international instruments on indigenous peoples, especially [Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples](#), the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), the [Pan American Sanitary Code](#), and the [Amazon Cooperation Treaty](#).

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## ANNEX A

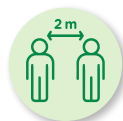
## WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The probability of contracting or spreading the virus can be reduced with the following practices:



**Wash your hands frequently. Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water**

**Why?** Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.



**Maintain social distancing. Maintain at least one meter of distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing**

**Why?** When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.



**Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth**

**Why?** Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once 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.



**Practice respiratory hygiene. Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately**

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



**If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early. Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority**

**Why?** National and local authorities will have the most up-to-date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections



**Stay informed and follow advice given by your healthcare provider. Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-19. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider, your national and local public health authority, or your employer on how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19**

**Why?** National and local authorities will have the most up-to-date information on whether COVID-19 is spreading in your area. They are best placed to advise on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves.



**Check the latest news on the most dangerous areas (those cities and places where the disease is spreading more widely). If possible, avoid going to these areas, especially if you are elderly or have diabetes, heart or lung disease**

**Why?** These precautions should be taken in these areas because the probability of contracting the virus is higher.





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