



COVID-19 GUIDANCE

Faith leaders: Communicating health protection information

Faith leaders are among the most trusted and respected sources of information in communities around the world. Often, people are more likely to trust and follow guidance about Covid-19 coming from their faith leaders than information coming from the government and health authorities. Faith-based organisations are also important providers of health care and social services which are often more accessible than state-run services for rural communities and marginalised populations. Faith leaders can also play a key role in countering and addressing misinformation, misleading teachings and false rumours which can spread rapidly during times of crisis and cause great damage. (See Tearfund's resource on [Addressing rumours and misinformation](#).)¹

What to communicate

Accurate information can reduce fear and stigma. Religious leaders should be aware of local and national health authorities' websites and other information channels providing local guidance. The most important protection information faith leaders can communicate to their members includes the following:

- **Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.** Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus via your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
- **Practise respiratory hygiene.** The virus is spread through droplets. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as flu and Covid-19. 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 in a bin with a lid and wash your hands.

¹ This material has been adapted from the World Health Organization's guidance for [Faith-based organisations and faith leaders](#). Always check with local and national health authorities first: they are the primary source of information and advice about Covid-19 in communities and can provide information about locally mandated restrictions.

- **Stay home if you feel unwell.** If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, call for medical advice. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to direct you to the right health facility. This will protect you and others, and help prevent the spread of viruses and other infections.
- **Clean your hands regularly and thoroughly with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.** Cleaning hands thoroughly kills viruses that may be on your hands.
- **Maintain a distance of at least one metre (three feet) between yourself and other people from outside your household.** A person who coughs or sneezes sprays small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth, which may contain the virus. If you are too close, you may breathe them in and become infected.
- **Follow the instructions of your local health authority.** National and local authorities will have the most current information on the situation in your area. They are best placed to advise on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves.
- **Stay informed on the latest developments** about Covid-19 from the [World Health Organization](#) and national authorities.
- **Stay informed about the levels of risk:** older people and people with underlying medical conditions are more at risk of severe illness.

How to communicate health protection information

The World Health Organization encourages faith leaders to use existing channels of communication such as organisational web pages, newsletters, emails, WhatsApp groups, faith publications, radio, or other broadcast media. Social media technologies offer religious leaders, faith-based organisations and communities of faith new ways to share life-saving messages.

Covid-19 messages can also be woven into sermons and prayers to be shared with church communities. It will be important for community members to hear these messages and updates frequently on different channels and message platforms.

Church leaders have a particularly important role to play in championing care for and inclusion of vulnerable people including minority groups, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, indigenous people, prisoners, people with disabilities, and members of other marginalised groups, by:

- creating supportive environments
- advocating for their rights and access to diagnosis, treatment and vaccines
- sharing evidence-based, accurate information
- taking a stand publicly against statements and acts that encourage violence and human rights violations

By drawing on biblical language, church leaders can promote positive messages that affirm the dignity of all people, the need to protect and care for the vulnerable, and inspire hope and resilience in those affected by, or vulnerable to, Covid-19.

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