



Dear Colleagues,

On March 12, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as no longer just an outbreak but as a *pandemic*, which is defined as a “the worldwide spread of a new disease.” With the rising number of cases in the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte aims to implement tougher measures to prevent and to control the spread of COVID-19.

But we first have to understand how **COVID-19 spreads**. COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu. It has been established that the COVID-19 virus spreads when someone who has COVID-19 coughs or exhales they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables or telephones. People could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. If they are standing within one meter of a person with COVID-19 they can catch it by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them.

Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age: people over 40 seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness. Though health authorities around the world and locally are working towards containing the outbreak, each one must should take part if we aim to fight this disease. It is a must that we take the following necessary precautions **EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY**:

- 1) **Personal Responsibility, protection and hygiene:** The practice of personal cleanliness and hygiene at all times of every individual in the community is vital to containing the spread of diseases and protecting the whole community. The following practices should be observed to halt the spread of COVID-19 from infected individuals:
 - a. **Personal responsibility.** Brief your staff that if COVID-19 starts spreading in your community anyone with even a mild cough or low-grade fever (37.3 C or more) **needs to stay at home**. They should also stay home (or work from home) if they have had to take simple medications, such as paracetamol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin, which may mask symptoms of infection. Make clear to employees that they will be able to count this time off as sick leave.
 - b. **Respiratory etiquette:**
 - Cough and sneeze into tissue or into shirt sleeve if tissue is not available. Dispose used tissues properly and disinfect hands immediately after a cough or sneeze.
 - Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth to help slow the spread of the virus.
 - The use face masks, which provides a physical barrier from the COVID-19 virus by blocking large-particle respiratory droplets propelled by coughing or sneezing, is **ONLY** recommended for:
 - o Persons caring for the sick
 - o Healthcare workers attending to patients with respiratory infection/symptoms (cough, colds)
 - o Persons with respiratory infection/symptoms
 - c. **Hand hygiene:**
 - **Perform regular and handwashing with soap and water.** Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% ethanol or isopropanol when soap and water are not available.

2) Social Distancing measures:

- a. Whenever possible, keep a distance of at least 1 meter (3 feet = 3 rulers) away from other people to reduce the possibility of person-to-person transmission. This distance should be observed even by healthy persons without symptoms. **Branches are asked to measure your area in square meters (sqm) and only allow 1 person to enter for every sqm. For example, if your branch has 30 sqm, a maximum of 30 people will be allowed to enter that area at a given time.**
- b. Postpone, or cancel mass gatherings until further advice by the DOH.
- c. **Limit use of the elevator.** Use the stairs more! It is also good for your health and heart.

3) Environmental measures (workplaces are clean and hygienic):

- a. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, including tables, doorknobs, desks, computer keyboards and telephones.
- b. Maintaining your surrounding environment clean, especially common-use areas and those with touchpoints such as elevators, railings, staircases, light switches, and the like.
- c. Make dispensers with alcohol-based hand rub widely available in public areas.

4) Food safety measures:

- a. Avoid consumption of raw or undercooked animal products. Handle raw meat milk or animal organs with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked food, as per good food safety practices
- b. When visiting live animal markets, wet markets or animal products markets
 - Practice general hygiene measures, including regular hand washing with soap and potable water touching animals and animal products.
 - Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with hands.
 - Avoid contact with (a) sick animals or spoiled animal products (b) other animal possibly living in the market (.eg., stray cats and dogs, rodents, birds, bats) and (c) potentially contaminated animal waste or fluids on the soil or structures of shops and market facilities
 - Do not slaughter sick animals for consumption. Bury or destroy dead animals and avoid contact with their body fluids without protective clothes.

5) If you really need to have a meeting with your team/branch* (guidelines for center meeting to follow):

BEFORE the meeting

- a. Consider whether a face-to-face meeting or event is needed. Could it be replaced by a teleconference or online event?
- b. Could the meeting be scaled down so that fewer people attend?
- c. Pre-order sufficient supplies and materials, including tissues and hand sanitizer for all participants. Have surgical masks available to offer anyone who develops respiratory symptoms.
- d. Actively monitor where COVID-19 is circulating. Advise participants in advance that if they have any symptoms or feel unwell, they should not attend.
- e. Make sure all participants, caterers and visitors at the meeting provide contact details: mobile telephone number, email and address where they are staying. State clearly that their details will be shared with local public health authorities if any participant becomes ill with a suspected



- infectious disease. If they will not agree to this they cannot attend the event or meeting.
- f. Develop and agree a response plan in case someone at the meeting becomes ill with symptoms of COVID-19 (dry cough, fever, malaise). This plan should include at least:
 - i. Identify a place where someone who is feeling unwell or has symptoms can be safely isolated
 - ii. Have a plan for how they can be safely transferred from there to a health facility
 - iii. Know what to do if a staff member or service provider tests positive for COVID-19 during or just after the meeting. Agree with the plan in advance with your partner health care provider or health department.

DURING the meeting or event

- a. Provide information or a briefing, preferably both orally and in writing, on COVID-19 and the measures that organizers are taking to make this event safe for participants.
- b. Build trust. For example, as an ice breaker, practice ways to say hello without touching.
- c. Encourage regular hand-washing or use of an alcohol rub by all participants at the meeting
- d. Encourage participants to cover their face with the bend of their elbow or a tissue if they cough or sneeze. Supply tissues and closed bins to dispose of them in.
- e. Display dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub prominently around the venue.
- f. If there is space, arrange seats so that participants are at least one meter apart.
- g. Open windows and doors whenever possible to make sure the venue is well ventilated.
- h. If anyone who starts to feel unwell, follow your preparedness plan or call your hotline.
- i. Depending on the situation in your area, or recent travel of the participant, place the person in the isolation room. Offer the person a mask so they can get home safely, if appropriate, or to a designated assessment facility.
- j. Thank all participants for their cooperation with the provisions in place.

AFTER the meeting

- a. Retain the names and contact details of all participants for at least one month. This will help public health authorities trace people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 if one or more participants become ill shortly after the event.
- b. If someone at the meeting or event was isolated as a suspected COVID-19 case, the organizer should let all participants know this. They should be advised to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days and take their temperature twice a day.
- c. If they develop even a mild cough or low-grade fever (i.e. a temperature of 37.3 C or more) they should stay at home and self-isolate. This means avoiding close contact (1 meter or nearer) with other people, including family members. They should also telephone their healthcare provider or the local public health department, giving them details of their recent travel and symptoms.
- d. Thank all the participants for their cooperation with the provisions in place.

Remember that **NOW** is the time to prepare for COVID-19. Strict compliance, simple precautions, and planning can make a big difference.

Yours truly,

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Executive Director

