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PURPOSE

This document provides guidance to UNHCR country operations on the priority actions for persons of concern to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak that was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by WHO on 30 January 2020.

UNHCR recommends implementing preparedness activities for refugees and other persons of concern as a component of, and in line with, the national preparedness and response plans. UNHCR's role within this national and/or regional response is two-fold:

Protection Ensure that all measures taken are aligned with the rights and needs of persons of concern in particular refugees and asylum seekers.

Inclusion Ensure that all refugees and other persons of concern are included in the national COVID-19 surveillance, preparedness and response planning and activities.

Background

On 30 January 2020, the Director-General of WHO declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). The new virus is from the same family of viruses that cause the common cold, as well as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). The primary objective of the international response to the COVID-19 outbreak remains stopping the human-to-human transmission of the virus, and caring for those affected.

Key Messages

- Ensure refugees and other POC are included in national surveillance & response planning & activities.
- Follow the lead of the MOH and WHO in the response.
- Establish protection monitoring and reporting networks in collaboration with governments and partners.
- Ensure refugees and other POCs have access to adequate and correct information in applicable language/s.

Protection Considerations

Governments in countries may take measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease. UNHCR advocates with governments to ensure measures implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19 accord with international standards in line with the WHO advisory and are human rights-based, non-discriminatory and proportionate.

UNHCR will collaborate with governments, UN Agencies and partners in response to the COVID-19 disease through **Protection Monitoring, Advocacy** and **Integration** into national response plans.

Integration into National Response

Refugees and other persons of concern may be at risk of protection violations if restrictions on entry, travel and freedom of movement are imposed by governments.

UNHCR and its partners advocate with and support the national governments to include refugees and other persons of concern in national response frameworks.

UNHCR may choose to supplement national responses to cater for needs in areas hosting refugees and other persons of concern that may not be adequately covered. Such support should be evidence-based, limited to the operational capacity and in line with the strategic objectives outlined below.

Protection Monitoring	Planning and Coordination	Communication & Community Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHO does not recommend travel restrictions associated with this outbreak. However, these may be put in place by individual governments and may be applied to POCs. Close monitoring is required to ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These do not unduly affect the right to access territory and seek asylum. ○ There is no refoulement based on real or perceived fears of coronavirus transmission. ○ Restrictions on freedom of movement, or other measures instituted by governments are applied to refugees and other persons of concern in a non-discriminatory way. • UNHCR operations are advised to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Put in place mechanisms in collaboration with governments and partners to monitor and report protection risks for refugees and persons of concern relating to coronavirus. ○ Advocate with governments to mitigate potential negative protection effects of such measures for refugees and persons of concern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active contribution and participation in the country and regional preparedness and response planning meetings called by the UNCT • In refugee hosting areas, where activated, participate in Government/Ministry of Health (MoH) led coordination meetings and include refugees in these preparedness and response plans. • Inclusion of refugees and persons of concern in national contingency planning efforts, including in calculations of needs in stockpiles of medicines, vaccines (if these become available), personal protective equipment, ancillary pharmaceuticals and supplies, and laboratory diagnostics. • Review UNHCR health partner capacity to respond in the event of an outbreak in refugee camps and settlements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis should be on hand washing and respiratory hygiene measures and early symptom identification. • Use the available national community education programmes and include refugees and other persons of concern in these. • Adapt the National/Subnational communication materials to suit local linguistic and cultural needs and utilize the existing communications networks in the community. • Conduct risk communication with partners, health workers, and POCs, including early distribution of educational information (verbal or written).
<h3 data-bbox="180 1200 568 1227">Epidemiological Surveillance</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where applicable contribute to surveillance, active case finding, contact tracing and investigation of alerts in collaboration with MoH, WHO and partners including at points of entry and refugee sites. • Countries using UNHCR Health information system (HIS) should ensure the surveillance is in line with MOH and WHO guidance and provide updates to the national authorities and WHO. 	<h3 data-bbox="604 1043 992 1070">Case Management</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train health workers working in refugee sites on case definitions and disease identification and management • Case management according to MoH and WHO guidelines. 	<h3 data-bbox="1029 931 1410 958">Infection prevention and control</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure adequate access to clean water and waste disposal in the community; soap, narrow necked water containers, and covered buckets for households. • Infection control in health centres must be adequate and staff trained. Ensure clean water supply, waste disposal (incinerators), latrines, and hand and surface disinfectants. In line with instructions of the MoH and WHO, create isolation rooms within UNHCR supported health facilities. • For additional medical supply needs, follow national preparedness plans and ensure appropriate calculations if additional supplies are ordered.

Guidance on Contingency Planning

The development of contingency plans is the responsibility of governments, supported by WHO and other partners with technical expertise.

UNHCR's operational response should be fully embedded within the national strategy and guided by the MoH and WHO.

Refugee-specific risk factors should be assessed regularly. Contact the UNHCR Public Health Officer in your Country Operation, Regional Bureau or at Headquarters for technical support.

Key Sites

- WHO COVID-19 Resource website:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> where you will find the following:
 - [Situation reports](#)
 - [COVID-19 situation dashboard](#)
 - [Global situation dashboard](#)
 - [Operational planning guidelines](#)
 - [Training and e-learning](#)