

# STIGMA

*Viruses don't discriminate and neither should we!*

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Public health emergencies, such as COVID-19, can lead to stigma of people, places, and things believed to be associated with the virus. For example, people from a specific nationality, population, or region of the world, may be discriminated against even though they may not be at increased risk of having the virus. Likewise, people who have been released from COVID-19 quarantine may be stigmatized, even though they are no longer contagious or at risk of spreading the virus. <sup>1</sup>

Some groups of people who may be experiencing stigma because of COVID-19 include:

- Individuals of Asian descent
- People who have traveled, especially to “high-risk” regions
- Emergency responders or healthcare professionals
- People who have had the virus or have been quarantined but have recovered from the virus
- People who are showing symptoms such as runny nose or cough



Stigma can result in negative emotional or mental health consequences to those being stigmatized and create an environment of general mistrust or anger in a community. Knowing the facts and sharing them with those around you can help reduce stigma.

## **COVID-19 Facts to Combat Stigma**

- **Coronavirus doesn't recognize race, nationality, or ethnicity.**
  - COVID-19 started in Wuhan, China. That is just a location. Chinese ancestry -- or any other ancestry -- does not make a person more vulnerable to COVID-19.
- **Wearing a mask does not mean a person is sick with COVID-19.**
  - People wear masks for a number of reasons, such as cultural or social reasons and to avoid pollen and air pollution. We should not assume someone has COVID-19 just because they are wearing a mask.
- **Combat stigma by sharing accurate information about COVID-19.**
  - Avoid spreading misinformation. Stay informed through reliable, trusted sources, such as the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization.
- **Say something if you see, read, or hear, misinformation or discriminatory information.**
  - Politely correct the misinformation and remind the speaker that stigmatized language and behaviors increase fear and make us all less safe.
- **Show empathy and support for those most closely impacted.**
  - Create learning opportunities in work and school that go against discriminatory and misinformed ideas. Listen, be empathetic, and, with permission, share the stories of people experiencing stigma, along with a message that discrimination is not acceptable.

## **Compiled based on:**

**Center for Disease Control (CDC):** <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/related-stigma.html>

**King County, Washington:** <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/novel-coronavirus/anti-stigma.aspx>

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<sup>1</sup> These are broad recommendations based on questions commonly asked. They are not intended to be comprehensive, and do not replace medical advice or public health guidance. If you or your child are concerned about COVID-19 infection or exposure, speak to your primary care provider about testing and additional precautions for your family.