

An Important Update from the Infection Prevention Team

COVID-19 Social Stigma

January 18, 2021

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, many people—including your BAYADA colleagues and clinicians—have unfortunately experienced “social stigma” following a COVID-19 positive diagnosis, required quarantining after exposure, or return from travelling. This stigma results from people being afraid, anxious, or confused about the virus itself.

At BAYADA, we are a community of compassionate caregivers, and want to do everything in our power to raise awareness of and combat COVID-19 social stigma—including welcoming back our colleagues who have had to quarantine, remain home after travelling, or isolate after a potential exposure or positive diagnosis. Demonstrating compassion means we are grateful for the resolution of our colleagues’ symptoms and their return to work.

What is COVID-19 Social Stigma?

COVID-19 Social Stigma is defined by the CDC as discrimination [including negative attitudes and beliefs] against an identifiable group of people, a place, or a nation. Stigma is associated with a lack of knowledge about how COVID-19 spreads, a need to blame someone, fears about disease and death, and gossip that spreads rumors and myths.



No single person or group of people are more likely than others to spread COVID-19. Public health emergencies, such as this pandemic, are stressful times for people and communities. Fear and anxiety about a disease can lead to social stigma, which can result in labeling, stereotyping, discrimination, and other negative behaviors toward others. For example, stigma and discrimination can occur when people link a disease, such as COVID-19, with a population (eg, emergency responders, health care professionals, migrants, refugees, or people with Asian descent), community, or nationality. Stigma can also happen after a person has recovered from COVID-19 or has completed home isolation or quarantine post exposure or return from travel.

Effects of Stigma

Stigma could lead to reluctance to seek treatment or testing or to self-quarantine, which could lead to poor individual health outcomes and further spread of COVID-19. It could drive people to hide their illness or exposure to prevent discrimination, prevent people from seeking health care immediately, or discourage people from adopting healthy behaviors.

How to Counteract Social Stigma

Build trust in reliable health services and advice, show empathy with those affected, understand the disease itself, and adopt effective, practical measures so people can help keep themselves and their loved ones safe.

How we communicate about COVID-19 is critical in supporting people to take effective action to help combat the disease and to avoid fueling fear and stigma. An environment needs to be created in which the disease and its impact can be discussed and addressed openly, honestly, and effectively. Remember these key points:

- COVID-19 is a global disease that is infecting anyone anywhere—all are at risk; the virus is not discriminating.
- People infected with COVID-19 are not spreading the virus on purpose.
- Getting the virus is not shameful; as humans, we are all vulnerable to communicable disease.

Tip 1: Words Matter

Use people-first language that respects and empowers people in all communication channels, which can shape the popular language and communication about COVID-19. People are not referred to as “COVID cases,” rather we have employees or clients who have COVID-19 or are recovering from COVID-19.

- Avoid certain words, such as “suspect case” or “isolation,” that may have a negative meaning for people and fuel stigmas.
- Don’t attach locations or ethnicity to the disease, this is not a “Wuhan Virus,” “Chinese Virus,” or “Asian Virus.”

Tip 2: Do Your Part to Drive Stigma Away

We all need to be intentional and thoughtful when communicating with each other, on social media, and other communication platforms, and demonstrate supportive behaviors around COVID-19.

- Stay updated and informed on COVID-19 through credible resources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and the BAYADA COVID-19 portal, to avoid miscommunication or inaccurate information.
- Focus on and spread the facts.
- Engage in an open dialogue about the harm of stigma.
- Upon return to the office following illness or quarantine, thank and welcome everyone back to the office or work with compassion.
- View people directly impacted by stigma as people first.
- Use language that is inclusive and compassionate.
- Amplify the voices, stories, and images of people—portraying all ethnic groups—who have experienced COVID-19 and recovered or supported a loved one through recovery to emphasize that most people do recover from COVID-19.
- Check your own stigmas and biases.
- Support your community with access to credible information.
- Speak up when you see or hear any discrimination.
- Link up with other efforts to reduce stigma to create a movement and positive environment that shows care and empathy.

Tip 3: Communicate Thoughtfully

- Misconceptions, rumors, and misinformation are contributing to stigma and discrimination, which hamper response efforts.
 - Correct misconceptions, while acknowledging that people’s feelings and subsequent behavior are very real, even if the underlying assumption is false.
 - Promote the importance of prevention, lifesaving actions, early screening, and treatment.
- Collective solidarity and global cooperation are needed to prevent further transmission and alleviate the concerns of communities.
 - Share sympathetic narratives, or stories that humanize the experiences and struggles of individuals or groups affected by COVID-19.
 - Communicate support and encouragement for those who are on the frontlines of response to this pandemic (health care workers, volunteers, community leaders, etc.).
- Facts, not fear, will stop the spread of COVID-19.
 - Share facts and accurate information about the disease.
 - Challenge myths and stereotypes.
 - Choose words carefully. The way we communicate can affect the attitudes of others (see Tip 1).

Resources Available

Several educational articles and resources are available to learn about COVID-19 stigma and ways to counteract it through words and actions. These are included within the Health and Wellness section of the [Resources to Navigate Your Entire Wellbeing Guide \(RENEW\)](#). We hope you find them helpful and informative.

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** Learn about social stigma related to COVID-19 and ways to reduce and prevent it. [>>](#)
- **Mayo Clinic:** COVID-19 stigma undermines efforts to test and treat disease. [>>](#)
- **Unicef:** Counteract COVID-19 stigma through thoughtful words and supportive behaviors. [>>](#)