STIGMA AND RESILIENCE

Public health emergencies, such as the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), are stressful times for people and communities. Fear and anxiety about a disease can lead to social stigma toward people, places or things.

For example, stigma and discrimination can occur when people associate a disease, such as COVID-19, with a population or nationality, even though not everyone in that population or from that region is specifically at risk for the disease. Stigma can also occur after a person has been released from COVID-19 quarantine even though they are not considered a risk for spreading the virus to others.

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

- Persons of Asian descent.
- People who have recently traveled (especially those who travelled abroad).
- Emergency responders or healthcare professionals.

Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear and anger towards other individuals. Those who are stigmatized may be subject to things such as:

- Social avoidance or rejection.
- Denials of healthcare, education, housing or employment.
- Physical violence.

Stigma affects the emotional or mental health of stigmatized groups and the communities they live in. Stopping stigma is important to making communities and community members resilient.

Everyone can help stop stigma related to COVID-19 by knowing the facts and sharing them with others in your community.

HOW TO COUNTER COVID-19 STIGMA

Individuals, especially those in the public health or media industries, can help counter the stigma by following these tips:

- Maintain privacy and confidentiality of those seeking healthcare and those who may be part of any contact investigation.
- Quickly communicate the risk or lack of risk from associations with products, people and places.
- Raise awareness about COVID-19 without increasing fear.
- Share accurate information about how the virus spreads.
- Speak out against negative behaviors, including negative statements on social media about groups of people or exclusion of people who pose no risk from regular activities.
- Be cautious about the images that are shared. Make sure they do not reinforce stereotypes.
- Engage with stigmatized groups in person and through media channels including news media and social media.
• Thank healthcare workers and responders. People who have traveled to areas where the COVID-19 outbreak is happening to help have performed a valuable service to everyone by helping make sure this disease does not spread further.

• Share the need for social support for people who have returned from China or are worried about friends or relatives in the affected region.

Source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases