# COVID-19 and Stigma

A resource for understanding and preventing COVID-19 stigma in healthcare.

## Social stigma

Social stigma is when society expresses their prejudices toward people with a condition, such as COVID-19. This often takes the form of fear, blame, and unfair treatment.

#### Stigma and pandemics

#### Pandemics tend to promote social stigma.

- Stigma is associated with poorer physical, mental, and emotional health.
- Stigma can cause people to hide their illness, which undermines testing and treatment efforts.
- Stigmatized individuals may also face social avoidance or rejection, and experience physical violence.

People who have been affected by COVID-19 have not done anything wrong, and they deserve our support, compassion, and kindness.

World Health Organization, 2020

#### Who is at risk for experiencing stigma during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Though physical distancing, quarantine, and travel restrictions have helped prevent the spread of COVID-19, they should not lead to the avoidance or mistreatment of people.

People perceived to be of Asian descent

- Though COVID-19 originated in a specific region of China, no one racial or ethnic group is at greater risk of infection or spread.
- The World Health Organization strongly recommends disease names should not include geographic location, specifically to avoid this kind of stigma.

People who have COVID-19 or have recovered from COVID-19

- People may experience avoidance after contracting COVID-19.
- People may be stigmatized for presumptions that they did not follow preventative measures like physical distancing and hand washing, though people may still contact COVID-19 in spite of these measures.
- People who have completed their quarantine period do not pose a risk to other people.
- People with pre-exisiting mental health or addiction concerns may be especially vulnerable to additional stigma brought on by COVID-19.

Healthcare workers treating COVID-19

- In disease epidemics, healthcare workers have reported feeling greater stigmatization than the general public.
- People should support and encourage those on the front lines responding to COVID-19.
- People should stay connected with loved ones working in healthcare, including through digital methods.



#### How can we help stop stigma during the COVID-19 pandemic?

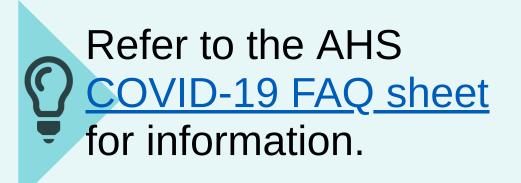


Stigma can be heightened by insufficient knowledge about COVID-19. Share accurate information from trustworthy sources about COVID-19.

Adopting protective measures is an effective way to avoid contracting COVID-19.

For most people, this is a disease they can overcome.

COVID-19 is spread mainly by coughing, sneezing, or direct contact with a sick person or surfaces they recently touched.



### Bust myths.

Misonceptions and misinformation contribute to discrimination and hamper the COVID-19 response.

Correct misconceptions while acknowledging people's feelings are real.

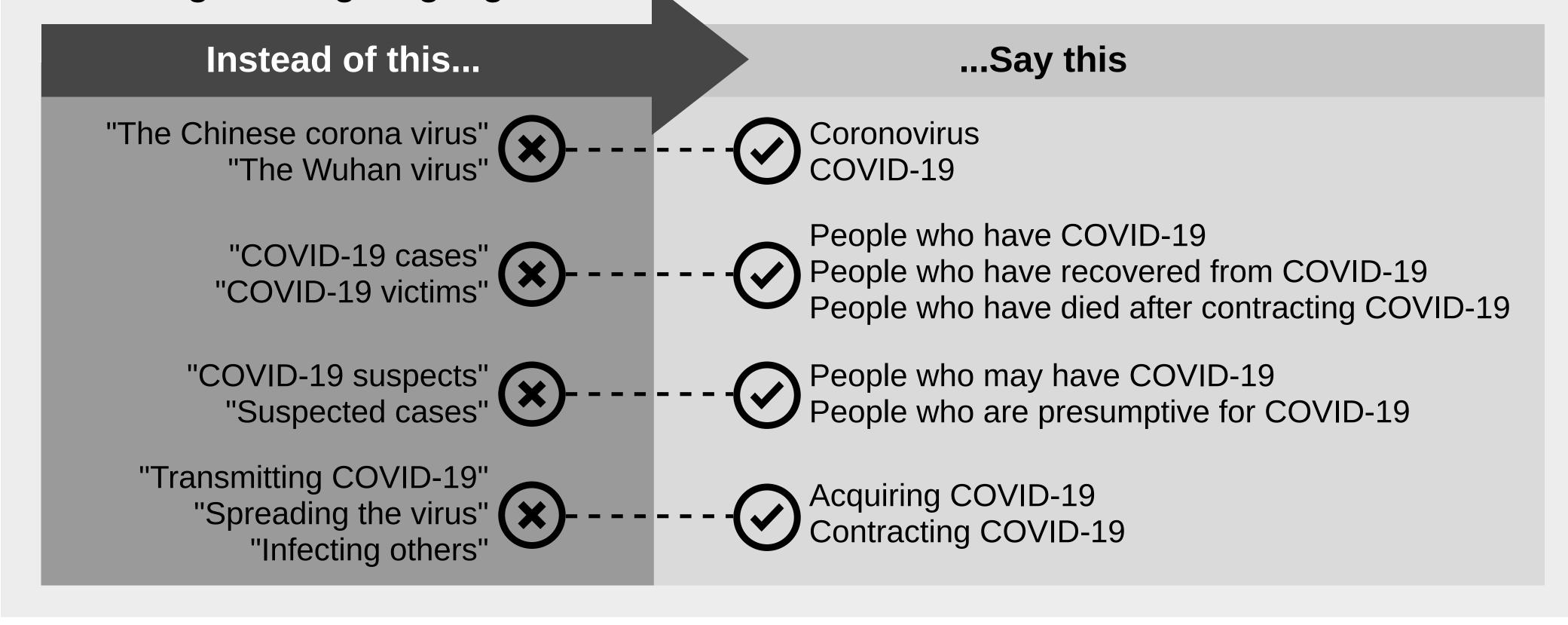
COVID-19 is not an airbourne illness.

Share sympathetic narratives, or the stories of people who have experienced or recovered from COVID-19.

There are no specific medications for COVID-19 at this time.

## Galley Use your words.

Use scientifically and medically accurate language, and person-first language. Correct stigmatizing language.



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