



**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

**MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL PROTECTION  
STATE DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION**

**OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY**

**Preventing and Responding to COVID-19**

Key messages to support those working with vulnerable children and families in Kenya

*April 2020*



## Introduction

The following are key messages including critical information about keeping children safe and healthy during the pandemic. Furthermore, the content addresses the psychosocial concerns and increased child protection risks that can occur as a result of measures put in place to prevent the spread and negative impact of COVID-19. The messages are designed for use by Children's Officers, child protection actors including directors of Children's Institutions, and members of government and civil society that work with vulnerable children and families. The information included herein should guide actions targeting and services provided for vulnerable children and families. The content of these messages incorporates guidance and related material published by the World Health Organization, Ministry of Health and UNICEF.

The guidance is designed to inform child protection actors and includes information targeting the following groups:

- Key messages about COVID-19 to provide to children
- Key messages about COVID-19 for caregivers/parents, including messages about preventing violence and online safety
- Key messages about COVID-19 for special populations of children, including:
  - Children with disabilities
  - Children in Children's Institutions
  - Children who have exited Children's Institutions, including care leavers
  - Street-connected children
  - Refugee children

This guidance should be considered a living document and will be updated as new information arises.

Please note that for all health-related information, please refer to the Ministry of Health website [here](#) as their guidance takes precedence.

## Messages About Coronavirus Disease to Share with Children

### What is coronavirus disease?

- Coronavirus disease, also referred to as COVID-19, is an illness caused by a virus that affects people's breathing and lungs.
- Coronavirus is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing without covering your mouth and/or touching the skin or other surfaces onto which the virus has attached.
- If you feel sick, like you have the flu, tell an adult and they will seek medical advice.
- Follow the rules put forth by the Ministry of Health.

### What can a child do to keep him/herself from getting coronavirus disease?

There are some important things you **should know and practice** to keep yourself and others healthy.

- Clean your hands with soap and water as often as possible. Wash for at least 20 seconds. Follow these five steps—wet, lather (make bubbles), scrub (rub together), rinse and dry. Sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice to know how long you should wash. If you do not have access to running water and soap, you may use 60% alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Talk about your feelings. Being worried or afraid is a normal emotion during difficult times. Find someone you trust and talk about it. There is no right or wrong way to feel but talking about it can help you feel better. You may call the Child Helpline at 116, at no cost, to talk to someone who can answer your questions or put you at ease.
- It is safe to play with your siblings, read books, sing, dance, pray, talk to your friends from a distance and play indoor games with your family. Be creative as you spend time inside your home. Do not fight with or be violent with others in your family.
- There is a lot of information about coronavirus disease but not all of it is true. Discuss information you hear or read with a parent or caregiver. You can also call 116 for more information.
- These are very difficult times, but every child has the right to be protected from violence. If you know of a child being abused or you are being abused tell someone. If you have access to a phone, call the police or Child Hotline 116. It is free.
- If you have access to a phone, WhatsApp or internet be careful about what you are viewing or reading. Always make sure that your parent or caregiver approve of what you are doing on the internet. Avoid chatting with strangers. Do not post personal information online such as address, phone number or location or your photos. EVER.

The following graphics are child-friendly and provided by the Ministry of Health and UNICEF. They can be printed or shared virtually.

# COVID-19: ways to help protect yourself and your loved ones



## ACT



**Wash your hands often and avoid touching your face**



**Stay home if you have a fever or cough**



**Avoid handshakes and close contact. Think of new ways to greet your loved ones**



**Cover your coughs and sneezes (use a tissue paper or your elbow)**

# STAY PROTECTED FROM CORONAVIRUS

To keep yourself, your family and friends safe from disease, wash your hands frequently with soap and water.



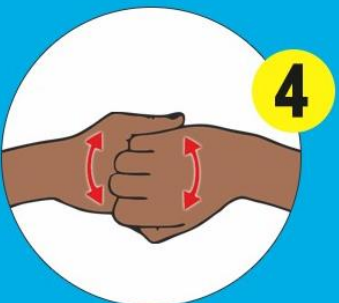
PALM TO PALM



PALM OVER BACK



BETWEEN FINGERS



BACK OF FINGER



BASE OF THUMBS



FINGER NAILS

## HANDWASHING STEPS

## Messages about COVID-19 to Share with Parents/Caregivers

There are some very important things that all parents or caregivers should understand and practice to keep family members healthy and safe during the crisis caused by COVID-19.

- Coronavirus disease, also referred to as COVID-19, is an illness caused by a virus that affects people's breathing and lungs.
- Know the facts and follow instructions from the **Ministry of Health** about how to prevent the spread COVID-19. You should also know what to do if someone falls ill.
- Have contact information of your community leaders (Chief, Nyumba Kumi, Child Protection Volunteer or Community Health Volunteer). Know where to seek help if needed.
- Be aware of any changes in your child's emotional behavior. Encourage your child to ask questions and express their feelings with you. Remember that your child may have different reactions to stress; be patient and understanding. In case you feel your child needs support from a professional counsellor, call child helpline 116 which is free of charge and can be accessed at any time.
- Young children who are not yet able to speak (particularly in the 0-2 age group) also notice and are affected by the stress and anxiety that family members are feeling. Very young children are particularly vulnerable in situations of crisis. Make sure to spend time with them and reassure them of your support.
- To help explain COVID-19 and address anxiety or other emotions that children might feel, parents can access this useful story [My Hero is You](#).
- Being inside the house with children all day can be stressful. However, be mindful of your own behavior. Step away, take a deep breath and give yourself a few moments to calm down if you get tense or feel angry. Never use violence against children.
- Model behaviors you would like to see in your children. When necessary, teach children right from wrong with calm words without resorting to harsh discipline methods. You can access free information on parenting in [English](#) and in [Kiswahili](#).
- Make good choices about where you get your information. The Ministry of Health is providing up to date and verified information about the coronavirus disease. If you have questions, please reach out to your local health facility or call 719. You can also visit these websites: <http://www.health.go.ke/covid-19/> or <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Be aware of what your child is watching online. Discuss and set rules about use of the phone, TV and internet. Always closely monitor and supervise your child's access to internet and phone to ensure that it is safe and appropriate.
- Do not permit children to play outside with other children. Instead, guide the children to indoor games or activities to keep them occupied. However, you should create time to play, read, pray or sing together as a family! This is a good way to reduce stress and anxiety.
- If you have to leave the home for work or for an extended period of time, be sure that your child(ren) are cared for by a trusted adult. When you come home you must wash your hands and change your clothes before engaging with your family.
- Ask for help if you feel that you are unsafe, or your children are in danger, but do not place children into a Charitable Children Institution. Contact a Chief, Child Protection Volunteer, Psychosocial Volunteer or a Children's Officer if you are worried about caring for your child.

## Key Messages to Prevent Domestic Violence and Violence Against Children

The current situation has put additional stress on families. Loss of income, closure of schools and fear of getting sick can all lead to an extraordinary amount of fear, frustration and anger. However, during these times, it is especially important that as adults, we manage our emotions and take active steps to control our reactions.

- Violence is never ok! Even when we are facing stress and pressure, it is not appropriate to take this out in a violent manner on any adult or any child. Ever!
- If you feel you are losing your temper, remove yourself from the situation – even if it is hard to do so in a small shared space, if you feel that you are going to get angry with someone else walk away. If possible, go outside, listen to music, pray or do something to calm yourself down.
- If you feel that you cannot calm down or fear that you will be violent to another adult or child, call someone for help. Ask a Chief, religious leader, Child Protection Volunteer or a trusted relative or friend for help.
- To try and avoid stress, anger or frustration during this difficult time, try to talk about things as a family. Create routines, house rules and find solutions that will enable all of you to feel safe and get through this difficult time.
- These are very difficult times, but every adult and child have the right to be protected from violence. Being required to stay home does NOT mean that you cannot seek urgent help, advice or support if you are being abused.
- If you would like to speak to a counselor, call 1199 to reach an online counselor.
- Witnessing and/or experiencing violence at home is extremely damaging to child development.
- If you are anxious about being abused, if you are being abused or if members of your family are being abused, find help. Go to a trusted neighbor, relative, Chief, Community Health Volunteer, Nyumba Kumi. Your safety is critical.
- If you have concerns about or know a child being abused, call the police or the Child Hotline 116. Do not subject your girls to FGM or child marriage as a coping mechanism. If you see such cases please contact and report to the nearest Chief, Child Protection Volunteer or a Children’s Officer or call 116, at no cost.

## Keeping Children Safe Online

As children continue to spend time at home during #coronavirus they will live more of their lives online. This makes them more vulnerable to online bullying, abuse and exploitation. Don't let coronavirus increase violence!

- **Explore together:** Ask your child to show you their favorite websites and apps and what they do on them. Listen, show interest and encourage them to teach you the basics of the site or app.
- **Chat little and often about online safety:** If you’re introducing them to new learning websites and apps while school is closed, take the opportunity to talk to them about how to stay safe on these services and in general. Ask if anything ever worries them while they’re online. Make sure they know that if they ever feel worried, they can get help by talking to you or another adult they trust.
- **Limit the time your child is online.** It is helpful to discuss and have an agreement between you and the child. Hold them to it!
- **Help your child identify trusted adults who can help them if they are worried:** This includes you and other adults at home, as well as adults from wider family, school or other support services who they are able to contact at this time. Encourage them to draw a picture or write a list of their trusted adults.

- **Be non-judgmental:** Explain that you would never blame them for anything that might happen online, and you will always give them calm, loving support.
- **Supervise their online activity:** Keep the devices your child uses in communal areas of the house such as in the living room or kitchen where an adult is able to supervise. Children of this age should not access the internet unsupervised in private spaces, such as alone in a bedroom or bathroom.
- **Talk about how their online actions affect others:** If your child is engaging with others online, remind them to consider how someone else might feel before they post or share something. If they are considering sharing a photo/video of somebody else, they should always ask permission first.
- **Use 'SafeSearch':** Most web search engines will have a 'SafeSearch' function, which will allow you to limit the content your child can access whilst online. Look out for the 'Settings' button on your web browser homepage, which is often shaped like a small cog.
- **Parental controls:** Use the parental controls available on your home broadband and all internet enabled devices in your home. You can find out more about how to use parental controls by visiting your broadband provider's website.
- **If you or your child come across harmful and inappropriate online content, please contact:** Website: <http://www.ke-cirt.go.ke>; Email: [incidents@ke-cirt.go.ke](mailto:incidents@ke-cirt.go.ke) Tel Hotlines: +254-703-042700, +254-730-172700 or call Child helpline 116

The Ministry of Health has provided the graphic below which can be printed or shared virtually with parents/caregivers.



## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILDREN FROM COVID-19 AT HOME



Ensure your children observe social distance (2-3 steps apart) in the house and out when playing.



Demonstrate proper handwashing procedures to your children.

Ensure all Household members frequently wash hands with soap and running water.



Ensure all surfaces in the Household are sanitized using chlorine and water solution.



Continue taking your children to health facilities for MNCH services as scheduled.

Give your children psychosocial support at home

**Incase your child develops fever, headache, cough, sneezing call 719 immediately**

## Messages for Parents/Caregivers of Children with Disabilities

- Be sure to explain, in whatever way is most appropriate for your child, how they should wash their hands. If they cannot do it by themselves, support them in doing it.
- Adhere to all the same rules and practices provided by the Ministry of Health for your child with disabilities that you would for other children.
- Certain disabilities make children more vulnerable to coronavirus disease. Extra precautions should be taken to protect them. If anyone in your family is showing signs of being sick, immediately move them into an isolated room and seek medical advice.
- Your child might be feeling anxious but not be able to express it. Be attentive to their reactions, moods or emotional behavior. Try to reassure and calm them. Be extra patient with them.
- Have a plan in place in case you or a family member gets sick. Make sure that you have identified a person who will take care of the child in the event that you cannot.
- Be aware that your child might require continued health services during this time. Be sure to discuss and create a plan with the health care provider.
- Have the name and number of a Community Health Volunteer, Chief, Child Protection Volunteer, Psychosocial Volunteer, or Children's Officer printed and accessible in case you need to reach them.
- This can be a very emotional time for everyone but especially as a parent of a child with disabilities. Make sure that you have someone to speak to or ask for help. Do not hesitate to reach out to a family member, friend or community support person if you need to talk or if you need a temporary break from caregiving.
- If you are part of a network of parents of children with disabilities, keep in touch with them via phone or WhatsApp. You can provide support to one another.
- Do not permit your child to play outside with other children. Instead, find creative and appropriate ways to engage the child, to his or her ability, in indoor games and play activities to keep them occupied. Create time to play, read, pray or sing together as a family. This will help put them at ease.

## Messages about COVID-19 for especially vulnerable children in Kenya

Evidence from previous infectious disease outbreaks indicate that existing child protection risks are exacerbated, and new ones emerge, as a result of the epidemic as well as of the socioeconomic impacts of prevention and control measures. Whilst all children must be made aware of how to prevent the spread of and respond to COVID-19, there are some children who are at increased risk in these circumstances. These include children without parental/family care, children living or connected to the streets and children in refugee settings, including those who are unaccompanied or separated. Because of their vulnerable status they can also be left out of key messaging and prevention and response actions by government and civil society. It is therefore imperative that the Government of Kenya and civil society organizations are proactively inclusive of and make a concerted effort to ensure that services reach these populations of children.

## Messages about COVID-19 for Children's Institutions

There are some very important things that you should understand to keep you, your staff and children in your care healthy and safe during the crisis. There are important **things that you must know and practice** to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease, treat someone who is sick and important protocols to ensure that children who are in your institution or those that exit stay safe and healthy.

- Follow all of the guidance provided by the Ministry of Health. See [here](#) for up to date information about preventing the spread and treating those who are sick with COVID-19.
- Limit the number of people you, your staff and the children interact with. The fewer people you engage with, the less chance there is to be exposed to people who may have the virus.
- Only essential staff, i.e., those responsible for the physical, emotional and safety needs of children in care, should report to work.<sup>1</sup> If space permits, essential staff should be encouraged to reside in the institution to minimize exposure to the virus.
- As per Ministry of Health guidelines, create protocols for any staff re-entering the institution after having been outside. For example, put a sign at the entrance, and handwashing point and/or a large alcohol-based sanitizer that must be used before entering.
- Receive all deliveries to the institution at the gate and maintain a social distance of at least 1.5 meters with the other person. All items brought into the institution should be disinfected immediately before use. Infection control processes in the institution should be adhered to at all times.
- No visitors should interact with children. Do not organize any events involving those outside the institution within the institution.
- Be supportive and actively listen to all children under your care during this time of uncertainty. If a child exhibits signs of worry or stress, take time to listen to them. Explore their concern and reassure and comfort them and explain, in a child friendly manner, about what is happening.
- In case you or a child could benefit from some professional advice about a psychosocial issue, call the Child Helpline at 116. Professional counsellors are available at no cost.

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<sup>1</sup> The [National Standards for Best Practices in Charitable Institutions](#) which provides that the staff ratio to the number of children should not exceed 1:10 (i.e. One staff member for every 10 children). This ratio includes staff members who have direct contact with children or who are otherwise known as caregivers.

- For children who cannot reunify with family, whenever possible and in the child’s best interest, encourage children to keep contact with their family through phone calls and texts as this will help calm their worries and fears.
- Be aware that children with certain disabilities or compromised immune systems are especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Pay extra attention to their handwashing and potential exposure to others.
- Explain to children that anyone can get sick from coronavirus and that treating children or adults who are sick in a negative or stigmatizing manner will not be accepted. Model this behavior.

**When CCI is sending children home (reunifying) to their families at this time, there are several things that you must do to ensure that the child’s transition is safe and that the child will remain safe and healthy within the family.**

- Talk to children about what is going to happen and ensure that they understand what is happening. If children express safety/security related concerns, take notes and discuss with children officers to seek for alternative options.
- Notify parents or caregivers of children **before** the child exits the institution. Work closely with the Children’s Officer, Chief, or Child Protection Volunteer or Social Development Officer in the location of the CCI and in the location where the family resides. This can be done via phone, email, text or WhatsApp.
- Document communication that happens with key actors at the community or county level.
- Prior to children exiting, document all of the following information about each child and share with the Children’s Officer, County Government and Chief as per the Principal Secretary’s memo 03/31/2020.
  - full name of child, date of birth, recent photo of the child, address where the child is going (county, village, location, landmarks, GPS), names of family members/caregiver that the child is staying with, relationship of the family members/caregiver to the child, contact information for the child, date of exit from the institution, contact information for the caregiver/parents, name and contact number of the Children’s Officer and Community Health Volunteer and/or Child Protection Volunteer, Psychosocial Volunteer or Social Development Officer in the location where the child is being placed.
- Conduct family assessments using existing documents and case files, and information collected via phone calls, etc. to ascertain the ability of parents/caregivers to ensure the child’s developmental needs are being met after they are released.
- Provide children and their families/caregivers child-friendly messages about coronavirus as per the Ministry of Health guidelines.
- Households should have access to running water and soap. If they do not, your institution should support or link them to other organizations that can provide.
- Follow up with children who have returned to their families using phone or other virtual means to ascertain if the child’s health, safety and developmental needs are being met. The first phone call should be two days after the reunification and then on a once a week basis. Ensure families have access to food and health care. Work with County Government, Children’s Officers, Social Development Officer, Psychosocial Volunteer, local organizations and community leaders to identify available support services or address any noted concerns

**When your CCI is sending young people home or arranging independent living in the community, there are several things that you [must do](#) to ensure that the transition is safe, and the young person is able to remain healthy.**

- Ensure that the young person has a place to live before they leave the institution.
- Facilitate the young person's transition, ensuring that they have clothing, personal hygiene supplies, and can cover basic needs.
- Link the young person to social support services that target vulnerable populations within the community. This includes food and financial (cash transfer) support services. Link them to the Children's Officer, Social Development Officer, Psychosocial Volunteer, Child Protection Volunteer, Community Health Volunteer and Chief in the area where they will be living.
- Discuss and prepare a virtual monitoring plan that includes talking via phone, email or WhatsApp on a weekly basis.
- Inform the young person about the Child Helpline 116 which offers free counselling, if needed.
- Share information about the [Kenya Society of Careleavers](#) or (254) 721-612864 with the young person should they want to connect with others living the same experience.
- Depending on the unique circumstances of the case and the desires of the young person, consider delaying the transition until it can be done in a manner that is safe for the young person.

## Messages about COVID-19 For Street Connected Children

Street connected children rely on services offered through drop-in centers to meet their basic needs. These children often have poor health status and may be more vulnerable to COVID-19. Further, these children can find themselves vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence if they are living alone on the streets, especially under current circumstances. Children in street situations are some of the most exposed to contagion given their vulnerable situation. It is therefore critical, that key messages and actions include this population of children. For children in street situations, access to help and services will become even more challenging due to lockdowns and closure of social services and may even face arrests and detention. Refugee and migrant children may also be prevented from accessing essential services due to legal, documentation, linguistic or safety barriers.

- Government and civil society must ensure that information reaches children on the street. Go to areas where street connected children gather and make sure that they understand the measures that need to be adopted to keep themselves healthy and protect them from COVID-19 using Ministry of Health-approved materials about physical distancing and handwashing.
- Governments and civil society organizations should ensure that drop-in centers and similar such facilities are designated as essential services and are equipped with child and youth friendly information as well as essential services such as health and education.
- Street children should be provided access to and information about psychosocial support available via the Child Helpline 116.
- COVID-19 can affect anyone. Fear and misinformation can cause social stigma, especially against children who are already vulnerable. Do not engage in, foster or allow any discriminatory actions against street connected children. These messages should be made clear to all health facilities, police and social service providers in COVID-19 messaging.
- Police should be directed to ensure that children in street situations are not arrested<sup>2</sup> for not self-isolating or being out past curfew, and instead, should be supported by connecting them to health services or emergency shelters.
- Whilst a curfew is in place, there must be a consistent message to police and others that brutality and unnecessary force should not be used against anyone especially children.
- Many children and youth forcibly returned to families from Charitable Children’s Institutions might not be safe or welcome within those home and are forced to the streets. Administrators of CCIs and SCIs **MUST** take all precautions to ensure that they are returning children home to safe and stable households avoiding situations that could potentially result in a child being forced to the street and unprotected.

## Messages about COVID-19 To Share with Refugee Children<sup>3</sup>

- Ministry of Health key messages about prevention and response to COVID-19, including messages for children and parents/caregivers (pages 1-4) must be adapted to the context and population and provided to all children and parents/caregivers in refugee settings (camps and host communities) **in the relevant languages** of those residing in the camp or host community.

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<sup>3</sup> Informed by: [https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/key\\_refugee\\_cp\\_considerations.pdf](https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/key_refugee_cp_considerations.pdf)

- Ministry of Health key messages about prevention and response to COVID-19, including messages for children and parents/caregivers (pages 1-4) must be adapted to the context
- and population and provided to all children and parents/caregivers in refugee settings **in the relevant languages.**
- Recognizing the hygiene challenges in many refugee contexts, extra attention must be paid to establishing sufficient handwashing stations, including access to running water, soap and hand sanitizer.
- Child protection service providers should put contingency plans in place to maintain access to critical child protection services, either remotely or in person with necessary precautionary measures.
- Child-friendly messages regarding Child Helpline 116 must be shared with children, via WhatsApp messages, fliers or calls from social workers or Children’s Officers.
- Support logistics to allow remote learning for refugee children, including innovative access to online resources, radio or other virtual means as well as access to sufficient textbooks.
- Disseminate and support access to online resources for children and families with accurate information accessible to refugees using Facebook, WhatsApp or other virtual platforms.
- Recognize that in already stressful environments, social isolation and curfew can exacerbate stress and result in increased domestic violence. Ensure that key messages to prevent or report gender-based violence against children are provided to all women and children in the languages spoken by the target population.
- Share positive parenting materials to parents via virtual platforms. See [here](#) for WHO-approved parenting in many languages.
- Recognizing the stress on parents and caregivers, they should be made aware of free online counseling at 1199.
- Unaccompanied or separated children still require alternative care. Children’s Officers and social workers should try to identify pre-approved kinship or temporary foster care for children. Placement in residential care should only be considered as a last resort.
- Recommendations to ensure online safety of children must also apply to children in refugee settings.
- The above messaging should apply equally to children of stateless persons in Kenya.
- For any child protection concerns, kindly note the following hotlines:
  - UNHCR Helpline:** 0800720063 (free)
  - Dadaab**
    - Child Protection Helpline Numbers: 0798 610 500/ 0720 037 050/ 0729 482 593/ 0715 514 759
    - SGBV: 0729 209 398/ 0717 968 219
  - Kakuma**
    - Child Protection Helpline: 0800 721 330 (toll free)/ 0800 720 141 (free)
    - SGBV: 0800 720 414 (free)
- **National GBV hotline number:** 1195