

BRIEF GUIDANCE ON RESPONDING TO RUMOURS

The 'RUMOURS AND ANSWERS' document contains direct responses to some rumours and misinformation that have been circulating about the COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan since March 2020. This guidance may be used by individuals or organizations who interact with the community so that they are prepared to respond effectively to any rumours or misinformation they hear. Responding to rumours is a way to give useful, verified and timely information and advice to communities, and to demonstrate that we are listening to them. The answers acknowledge the confusion or fear that may have generated the rumour or triggered its spread – this is important when giving advice, direction and offering information on steps that communities can take to limit the transmission of the virus and to protect themselves and each other. Simply saying something is not true is not helpful or effective.

The document may be effective as a resource for:

- Humanitarian / NGO / Government Field Teams
- Health Workers
- Community leaders and community networks
- Media outlets, radio and TV broadcasters

All of us working with rumours should keep in mind the **do no harm** principle. For more guidance, refer to the CDAC Network's *Practice Guide to Working With Rumours*.

How to use this document

1. The responses are carefully worded and approved by the Government of Afghanistan's Ministry of Health. **Avoid summarising** them in a way that will significantly change the text or meaning of the response.
2. Ensure that you **give clear, actionable advice** about good habits and next steps; ensure people know where they can go for medical assistance or more information.
3. **Listen to community**; if they raise a rumour or misunderstanding, you can search the document for a relevant response. If it is something new, or something is still not clear to them, note it down and pass it on to the RCCE Working Group.
4. If you print the rumours and post them somewhere public, **ensure that the date is highlighted** on the document and **check that the information is not outdated**. Advice may change as we come to understand more about the virus, or as government policy, regulations or other factors change the way we respond to it. The *Key Prevention Message* at the top of the document, is repeated throughout and will not change. The RCCE Working Group is committed to updating the rumours regularly, and dating them is essential to overcoming misinformation and avoiding causing harm.
5. As literacy is low in many parts of Afghanistan, you may read these, or adapt them to suit different distribution platforms such as audio visual mediums etc. Ensure that you **include and repeat the key actionable information** such as where to get help locally, rather than the rumour itself.
6. **Avoid reinforcing misinformation** and rumours by repeating them.

Key Prevention Message - It is critical that the following message about prevention be shared in its entirety as follows:

To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others. People with severe symptoms may be treated in hospital with equipment that helps them breathe, however most people are able to recover from the symptoms without this level of treatment. If you feel sick with mild symptoms, stay at home in isolation and strictly avoid sharing space with other members of the family for at least 15 days. The same is true if one of your family members are affected because you may also have the virus. Call the national MoPH hotline on 166 or your provincial MoPH hotline if you need more information.