Preparedness and prevention measures to minimize the spread of coronavirus during FAO field activities

(version 1 - 23 March 2020)

As Covid-19 spreads rapidly in every continent, FAO staff, engaged in providing assistance to beneficiaries, should be mindful of the risks of further propagating COVID-19 during FAO’s activities.

COVID-19 will inevitably affect rural population groups who are already vulnerable and facing multiple challenges, including poverty, food insecurity and under-nutrition, conflict, etc. Therefore, it is important to continue implementation of critical, life- and livelihoods-saving interventions while carefully reviewing operational modalities to ensure FAO activities are doing no harm, not contributing to the spread of the disease and keeping beneficiary communities safe.

FAO country offices are invited to review their “programme criticality” (prioritizing essential activities across the entire country programme) and prepare a plan reducing ALL activities requiring physical contact to a strict minimum. Alternative ways of distribution (including mobile transfers, etc.) should be prioritized. For activities that are continuing and that require gathering or physical contact with beneficiaries, including distributions of goods, cash, or vouchers, careful consideration of the following steps and precautions to minimize the spread of the infection:

1- Communication and community engagement

- Provide information to beneficiaries and staff from implementing partners about the new coronavirus, its transmission mechanism and steps to prevent its spread (handwashing, health check, cleaning equipment, social distancing).
- Explain the importance of social distancing, that is, any action that helps people to maintain a distance (of 1 meter, preferably 2) among each other.
- Take special precautions with high-risk beneficiaries (older adults or people with an increased susceptibility to Covid-19), put in place alternative arrangements for these groups such as allowing alternative collectors to come on their behalf. The IPs should also establish the waiting points for accompanying persons who should fully adhere to the social distancing requirement. When not possible, ensure that they take preventive measures (wash hands, are never in close contact with other people) during FAO’s activities.

2- Planning distributions and distribution site layout

Plan Distributions

- Take special precaution identifying the distribution point-avoiding beneficiaries to move on long distance.

Consider multiplying the distribution points, reducing the number of beneficiaries to a maximum of 50 people to be served in each distribution point. Minimize activities requiring gathering of people, or organize them over a longer period of time to reduce as much as possible the number of people simultaneously present.  

Stagger activities and distributions (for instance providing disbursements that may cover longer periods of time) to ensure physical distancing and reduce frequency of gatherings.  

Organize and clearly mark the allocated spaces at the distribution site:  

- Mark clearly entry and exit routes to and from activity/distribution sites (accessible to people with disabilities with the view to provide assistance to one beneficiary at the time)  
- Establish a reception point, (identity) verification point, collection point and exit to channel traffic and allow for personal space of at least 1-2 meter between each beneficiary.  
- Allocate areas for health screening/body temperature checks by health officials  
- Flexibility is required to allow high-risk populations to send alternate collectors on their behalf. When not possible, allocate adequate areas for the elderly, pregnant and lactating women and people with disabilities after health screening / body temperature checks in order to prioritize distribution and minimize exposure. Emergency support to pregnant women and elderly should be prioritized.  
- Establish sheltered / covered area for beneficiaries that do not receive clearance at the health screening / body temperature check point. The allocated area should be spacious enough to allow beneficiaries to sit/stand at least 1-2 meter apart from each other.  

Ensure Social Distancing:  

- There should be no physical contact between IP staff and beneficiaries or between beneficiaries  
- Instruct beneficiaries to avoid being in close proximity (within 1 to 2 meters) of other people, including family members and bystanders. When interactions within 1 to 2 meters are unavoidable, these should be as brief as possible.  
- Cordoned off (with a rope or a tape) a 1-2 meter radius around the desk at the collection point if possible  
- IP staff at the collection point should place the voucher/card/envelope on the table at the distribution point and step back, permitting the beneficiary to collect the item without any physical contact  
- Beneficiaries should not pass through the distribution point more than once  
- Direct beneficiaries to leave the activity/distribution site as soon as they have collected their entitlements (goods, cash, vouchers) or completed an activity (work)  
- Recommend beneficiaries to avoid gatherings of any sorts before and after FAO activities  

Consider Hygiene:  

- Whenever possible, set up hand washing stations for beneficiaries including portable ones. When clean water is not available, be prepared to dispense hand sanitizers.  
- Remind beneficiaries to avoid touching their faces and to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or their upper sleeve.
• Ensure that beneficiaries wash their hands before collecting their entitlement
• Provide protective equipment when required and available (masks, gloves, etc.)
• When, during data collection or registration of beneficiaries, tablets or biometric equipment are used, instruct beneficiaries to soap-wash their fingers/hand after each usage and do not clean the sensor or device itself.
• Clean card (e-voucher) readers - when they are off/unplugged - with a 70% isopropyl alcohol wipe.
• On completion of distribution, ensure that the distribution point (room/ area/) is swept clean and sprayed with disinfectant (0.5% chlorine solution). The broom may be used again after being disinfected.
• Remove all tapes, ropes and signage.
• Clear and wash station and remove/store hand washing solution.
• It is mandatory that all staff at the distribution site perform hand sanitation regularly and follow general hygiene practices.

Health screenings

• Upon arrival at the distribution site, direct beneficiaries to the supervised hand washing area and then to the health screening area to have their body temperature assessed using a non-invasive (handheld / no-touch) thermometer. Ideally, the health screening should be conducted by a medical or health professional endorsed by government authorities.
• It is important to ensure that the screening process covers identification of signs and symptoms of COVID-19, as well as the risks of exposure, for example: observation visual signs of respiratory illness, coupled with questions on presence of fever or respiratory symptoms, and questions on history of contact with a potential COVID-19 case.
• If a beneficiary is detected to have a fever or shows flu-like symptoms, directed them to the specified sheltered/covered area for a follow up by a government approved healthcare official/worker. The healthcare worker should then refer the beneficiary either to Rural health center or to District hospital and alert the district administration authorities.
• These healthcare workers should ideally have a supply of the recommended personal protective equipment (PPE).
• Inform/assure beneficiaries that do not get cleared at the health screening / temperature check areas that they will receive rations irrespective of the results of the screening.
• Direct beneficiaries cleared at the health screening area are to the (identity) verification checkpoint.

3- Hygiene and sanitation products

Hand wash solution (0.05% chlorine solution) can be made from a variety of chlorine bases available in the market.

Washing hands with clean water and soap is mandatory for all staff / personnel, beneficiaries and any other party involved in the process/present at the distribution site.

• Instructions for making mild hand wash solution (0.05% chlorine solution): [English](#) / [French](#).
• Instructions for making soapy water: [English](#) / [French](#).
Disinfectant (0.5% chlorine solution) can be made from a variety of chlorine bases available in the market. All washing and disinfecting solutions must be prepared prior to dispatching to the distribution point and marked clearly.

- Instructions for making disinfectant solution (0.5% bleach solution) from liquid bleach: [English](https://www.cdc.gov), [French](https://www.cdc.gov).

Concentrated chlorine and bleach are highly toxic substances that can cause irritation and inflammation to eyes, throat and nose. When mixing and using 0.5% disinfecting solution, appropriate PPE (including impermeable coverall, apron, N95 mask, goggles and double glove i.e. inner disposable latex gloves and outer heavy-duty latex gloves) must be worn.

Personnel working in collective sites need to understand the risks of COVID-19 introduction and propagation in the site, be trained and monitored on self-protection measures and the rational use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE).

Important Note: All staff / personnel and IPs are responsible for complying with all aspects of the SOPs identified at the country level. All personnel should maintain spatial distance of at least 1 metre. Personnel with potential risks of exposure to COVID-19 off-site shall not come to work for 14 days since the day of exposure, to prevent contamination to residents and host communities; those experiencing signs and symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 should not be allowed to work at the site either, until COVID-19 is ruled out and/or full recovery is attained. Measures need to be developed to ensure the temporary transfer of responsibilities of affected personnel to their colleagues.