GROUP DISTRIBUTION TIPSHEET: Cash, Vouchers, & Goods

Mercy Corps has a mandate to provide life saving support during humanitarian crises like COVID-19. Communities have basic needs that need to be met during this time. This tip sheet is a guide to teams on how to conduct distributions in the safest ways possible for our teams and the communities we serve.

We want our teams able to conduct distributions
● **Safely**: we need less touch points and to lower our exposure (both ways)
● **At Scale**: ability to distribute at volume
● **With Accountability**: Monitor and provide feedback mechanisms with fewer touch points.

**Key requirements at each point of the distribution**
● **Hand-washing for 20 seconds** before and after all contact points for all team members, contractors, sub-grantees, and participants. [See WASH tipsheet](#) for how.
● **Disinfect** surfaces (tables, etc.), supplies (pens, etc.), and distributed goods. [See WASH tipsheet](#).
● **Ensure that people are separated by 1 meter (and preferably 2)** at every stage of the distribution.

1. **Personal and Team Preparation**
   The following tipsheets contain the most frequently updated information on personal practices that can reduce the risk of COVID, and actions to take when traveling to field sites. All are available on the [Hub COVID-19 page](#): Annex 1: Personal Hygiene and Handwashing; Annex 3: Personal Protective Equipment; Annex 4: Disinfecting Offices and Vehicles; and Annex 11: Field Work Safety Essentials.

2. **Procurement**
   See [Preparing Our Procurement & Logistics Operations for Coronavirus](#) and [Hardcopy Tender Submissions During COVID-19](#).

3. **Program design & modality selection**
   For program design and approach considerations that apply to cash, vouchers, and goods distributions, see the [CVA Tip Sheet](#). Review your context to determine if a particular modality or distribution method carries less risk than others. Risks include COVID transmission, reliance on and supply in local markets, mobility of participants, government restrictions, theft experienced by participants after the distribution, intra-household dynamics, etc. See Door-to-door Distribution Guidance (forthcoming) and [Cash Payment and Digital Data Management Guidance](#).

4. **Confirming & Organizing Kit Contents**
   MC has an obligation to distribute the items we said we would, according to agreed upon quality specifications. The Coronavirus lives on surfaces for different amounts of time; evidence is still emerging as to how long and if this is a key transmission risk. Current reports indicate 24 hours for cardboard, 3 days for steel and plastic. MC can change the way we confirm the quality of goods. However, if changes
to quality control procedures reduce your ability to confirm the quality specifications of goods, it must be discussed with compliance and RPT. See WASH tipsheet for how to disinfect.

- **Ensure adequate quality checks upon receipt** of goods from vendor. Disinfect packages before you inspect them, or include a clause in the contract noting that goods will be left in storage without anyone touching them for a certain period of time before the inspection will take place.

- **Ensure packaging that can be carried by participants.**

- **Ensure kits are disinfected before loading,** require workers to wash their hands before/during/after.

- **Arrange for kits to stay in storage at the distribution site for a period of time and/or disinfect the kits prior to distribution** to participants.

5. **Distribution Site Selection and Set-Up**

- **Hold the distribution in a large, well-ventilated space or preferably outside.**

- **Schedule multiple, smaller distributions** instead of large ones.

- **Clearly delineate the waiting area and lines** to the registration tables with rope, fence, stones, or tape, ensuring 1-2 meters of space between people in all directions.

- **Ensure 1-2 meter between participants and MC team members at registration tables and then goods pick up area.** Consider setting up the table so that the longer side provides this separation.

- **Clearly mark** entry / exit, registration table, goods pick-up area, CARM helpdesk, etc.

- **Limited entry and exit areas** (preferably one each) to facilitate crowd control.

- **Consider a site location that will not** require participants to travel in crowded conditions (e.g. buses, etc.) to reach the site.

- **Set up a “fast track” lane for participants who are elderly, show up ill, or a part of an immunocompromised group.** Do not communicate the availability of this line in advance, as we do not want families to send vulnerable members to take advantage of it.

- **Consider “no contact” ways to provide CARM feedback,** such as placing a suggestion box at the help desk, posting CARM hotline contact information, or providing sufficient space for a participant to share feedback with the CARM officer without others overhearing. View the CARM COVID-19 Tipsheet for additional information and ideas.

- **Set up hand-washing stations at the entry and exit areas, and for each contact point** (e.g. registration desk, commodity pick-up area, etc.). Require participants to wash hands with soap for 20 seconds at each stage. See also the WASH Tip Sheet and Tip Sheet on Water Distribution for set-up guidance.

- **Set up tables for contactless kit/goods pick-up.** MC team members can put the kit on the table, and step back while the participant picks it up. MC team members in this role should wash their hands frequently and avoid touching their faces.

- **See pictures of how Niger, Mali, and DRC have set up distribution sites.**

6. **Planning for the distribution**
Ensure sufficient team members for crowd control and maintaining 1-2 meter distance in all directions between the participants. Consider hiring day laborers if you don’t have sufficient staff. Assess staffing plans to ensure sufficient staffing, even if a large percentage of staff become sick and must stay home. Consider MC shirts or hats to make it clear who is providing crowd control support. Train all team members and daily workers on COVID transmission and best practices.

Assign team members to cover hygiene responsibilities, such as wiping down all surfaces and supplies, ensuring sufficient hand-washing supplies, and overseeing handwashing stations. See WASH tipsheet for how.

Train and assign key team members to lead COVID sensitization efforts for participants in line. Alternating music and messages through loudspeakers is a more pleasant way to wait in a queue.

Assign a team member to screen/identify people who should use the fast track line when they arrive and direct participants to handwashing stations. This entails asking people if they exhibit any symptoms or check temperature with infra-red thermometers, or if they fall into a vulnerable group.

Communicate with participants: they should understand 1) what they will receive; 2) what no-contact CARM feedback channel they can use; 3) that they will be required to wash their hands at the site; and 4) how their identity will be verified--if an ID or password, the participant should know this in advance.

Train a community focal point to reinforce communications with participants and community leaders. Train focal points on COVID transmission (you can use the same training as for team members), and provide guidance on how to hold community meetings and visit households in a safe way (see Annex 11, pages 4 and 6).

Consider and communicate accommodations for particularly vulnerable people (elderly, immunocompromised, etc). Consider allowing these people to send a proxy, or have access to an even smaller distribution. This is in addition to the fast track line.

Communicate with community leaders: MC should provide information on COVID and how it is spread to community leaders, and agree on appropriate risk mitigation mechanisms jointly (so MC is not blamed later), unless there is reason to not engage the local leaders/authorities.

Key best practice: Hold a practice run to ensure staff understand roles, the flow of people, etc.

7. During the Distribution

The whole distribution process should be transparent and visible to participants moving through it.

MC team members greet participants: check to see if they should go in the fast track lane and ensure they wash their hands.

Check in at regular intervals (~30 min) to ensure the key practices are in place (regular hand-washing for everyone involved, disinfecting surfaces and supplies, 1-2 meters distance between all people).

Handwashing before/after unloading, and before handing kits to participants.
Keep participants informed throughout the process.

8. **If using vouchers or cash...**
   - Train vendors on COVID-19
   - Consider a contactless way for vendors to collect vouchers (e.g. drop in a bucket).
   - If using electronic vouchers, have the participant wash their hands, swipe their own card, and the vendor to disinfect the terminal after each PIN entry.
   - Consider ways that commodities can be packaged and disinfected (or stored, without people touching them) prior to distribution.
   - If handling large volumes of cash and vouchers, ensure regular hand-washing (consider setting a timer, and wash hands every 20-30 minutes). If feasible, cash can be sorted into envelopes and stored, untouched, for 24 hours prior to distribution.
   - See the [Cash Payment and Digital Data Management Guidance](#) if you are working with a payment provider, and carefully assess risks (and contact us!) if you are not.

9. **Verifying participant identity**
   A key challenge for distribution is **verifying the participants identity while maintaining little/no contact, and hand-washing after any contact.** The strategy you use will depend on contextual constraints and considerations. If you significantly change the way you verify participant identity at the distribution, it is suggested that you inform your donor. Below are options and considerations.
   - WFP has recommended **not to use biometrics**, as participants need to put their fingers in a terminal that scans the fingerprint. If you continue to use biometrics, ensure hand-washing and that the terminal is disinfected after each participant.
   - Participants can provide their name, and then **recite a PIN, password, ID number, or telephone number** at a distance of 1-2 meters from a MC team member. Consider ramifications on privacy and minimize risk of others overhearing. Another option is for the participant to put down an ID card on the table, step back for the MC team member to look at it from a distance, and then recover the ID afterward. MC can look up the name on the distribution sheet, and match it with the number/password provided.
   - An additional MC team member can be assigned to each registration table **to observe the participant verification process**. This person should sign every page of the distribution list to confirm that he/she observed the verification of the participants. Depending on your context, consider if a community leader would be well-placed to serve this function and decrease risk.

10. **Confirming receipt of goods**
    Mercy Corps requires that participants sign/thumbprint to confirm receipt of goods.
    - Participants should wash their hands prior to touching the pen, inkpad, or distribution list.
    - Advise participants to not touch their face during this process.
    - Participants can wash their hands again after signing to confirm receipt.

11. **Post-distribution monitoring**
    See [Remote MERL Guidance](#) and [Quick Tips for Remote MERL Management](#).

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