

YOUNG PEOPLE AND COVID-19: What media should know

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) continues to affect the lives and livelihoods of people all around the world. As of 12 October 2020, 37.4 million confirmed cases have been reported globally. The African region has reported about 1.2 million cumulative cases with 39 of 49 affected countries/territories/areas reporting ongoing community transmission.ⁱ

Can young people get COVID-19?

Yes. People of any age and gender can be infected with COVID-19, including young people aged 10–24. Although they are more likely to develop mild or no symptoms compared to older people.

Can young people spread COVID-19?

Yes. Infected people in all age groups – including young people - can transmit the virus to other people, even if they have mild symptoms or do not feel ill. The virus is spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or speaks.

How are young people affected by COVID-19?

Young people with chronic conditions are thought to be at higher risk of getting severe symptoms when infected with COVID-19. There are also healthy young people who can become seriously ill and even die from COVID-19. It is important for all young people to observe the preventive measures such as washing hands with soap, physical distancing and wearing masks in public.

Aside from the health impacts, young people are exposed to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes food shortages, job loss and family support. In this regard, it is important to understand and respond to the needs of different groups of young people, such as girls, young people with disabilities, those from low-income families, and refugees and IDPs.

Young people are also affected by the measures to contain the spread of the virus, such as lockdowns and school closures, which have led to interruptions in education and access to health services. This has led to increasing levels of domestic violence, stigma, stress and mental health issues among some young people.

How can young people be protected from COVID-19 and maintain wellbeing?

- The same public health measures applied to adults should be emphasized for young people.
- Hand hygiene with either soap and water or alcohol-based sanitizer, physical distancing of at least 1m and use of masks in public, are key to reducing the rates of infection and transmission.
- People should also avoid closed spaces with poor ventilation, crowds and close physical contact when in public.
- In addition, opportunity should be extended for young people to be informed, empowered and, as appropriate, to participate in the COVID-19 response.
- It is important to consult young people to understand their needs and challenges in applying the recommended preventive practices AND to work with them to find feasible options to overcome these barriers. Media can be of great support in these consultations. Journalists should also consider young people as a group with specific needs and concerns, who can become part of the solution with proper support and empowerment.

How can media help to engage young people in the response to COVID-19?

Inform – provide information on COVID-19 addressing the challenges facing young people and how to deal with those challenges.

Amplify their voices – conduct interviews with young people in your country. Listen to their experience and discuss what is affecting their lives most. Harness and show case the ideas and solutions that young people have in responding to COVID-19 so that they feel empowered to become leaders within their communities.

Help young people to participate in social action – support young people to gain the knowledge and skills they need to protect themselves effectively, lead in taking care of their families and support their communities during the pandemic. Where appropriate, engage young people in designing and delivering health awareness campaigns, so that they have the opportunity to participate in social action.

Advocacy – provide an opportunity for young people (e.g. through youth organizations) to engage with decision-making bodies leading the response against COVID-19 at national and regional level. Establish dialogue opportunities between young people and senior managers in government and in National RCCE coordination mechanism so that their voices and needs are heard by the decision makers.

Further reading:

- WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA and UNICEF (2020). *Adolescents, youth and COVID-19*. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/q-a-adolescents-youth-and-covid-19>
- Ground Truth & Shujaaz Inc. *Covid-19 barometer: Assessing the impact of the first 8 weeks of the coronavirus crisis on lives of young people across Kenya* <https://www.shujaazinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Shujaaz-Inc-29.05-GroundTruth-COVID-19-Barometer-V0211.pdf>
- Shujaaz Inc. *Barometer: Tracking the impact of Covid-19 + Compass: Navigating the road ahead* <https://www.shujaazinc.com/publications/14-09-covid-19-barometer-compass/>

ⁱ WHO Coronavirus Disease Dashboard. Situation by Country, Territory & Area. Accessed on 13 October 2020. <https://covid19.who.int/table>