

Stigma and COVID-19

Stigma and discrimination often occur out of fear and uncertainty. As COVID-19 is new and there are many unknowns about this virus, it can lead to misconceptions. According to the *Centre for Addiction and Mental Health*, it can appear in various ways, including:

- Referring to COVID-19 as the “foreign virus,” or *Asian* or *Chinese flu*
- Blaming a person or group of people who may have the virus for “being careless, not following the recommendations and spreading the illness”
- Avoiding places associated with myths about the virus, such as Asian restaurants or grocers
- Verbal or physical attacks on certain ethnic groups
- Refusing service or enforcing different policies for health care professionals or other essential services under the assumption they pose a greater risk of spreading the virus



Impacts of stigma and discrimination can...

- Make people with the virus feel guilty or bad about themselves
- Lead people to become socially isolated to avoid discrimination
- Increase anxiety for those with the virus as they deal with discrimination
- Cause people with the virus to go against self-isolation recommendations to hide their sickness and avoid discrimination
- Prevent people from getting tested or seeking treatment for the virus out of fear of discrimination

Reducing stigma and discrimination

- Be careful of the language used to describe the virus or someone who has the virus
- Stay informed with **facts** from credible sources, such as the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), [COVID-19 in Ontario](#), or [Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health](#)
- Respect people’s privacy if you know someone with the virus
- Focus on positives, such as the steps being taken to contain the virus and the preventative steps that people can take to keep safe
- Support someone who is experiencing stigma or discrimination because of COVID-19
- Speak out against stigmatizing behaviours you see or read about
- Show support and encouragement for individuals performing essential services

You may be feeling anxious, frustrated or scared, and it may be comforting to look for someone to blame but do not let fear of COVID-19 turn into stigma.

We are all in this together. Take a stand against stigma in our community!

Sources

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – [Stigma and prejudice](#)

World Health Organization - [Social stigma associated with the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)