

## Social Stigma Behaviour and COVID-19

ISU is proud of its diverse and inclusive community that offers a home away from home for many of our international families. We would like to take this opportunity to remind all our community members about an important principle contained in the ISU Guiding Statements - our school's commitment to provide a supportive and enabling learning environment. One of the ways we achieve this is by promoting the principles of understanding and respect between individuals, communities, cultures and nations. The COVID-19 situation has, in some isolated cases, led members in some communities to experience discrimination on the basis of race or nationality.

At ISU, we do not expect any member of our community to engage in or experience such discriminatory behaviour. We are confident that our strong, vibrant and diverse community composed of over 40 nationalities is committed to the ISU mission of providing a supportive and enabling learning environment where all members of our community are challenged to achieve their potential, encouraged to pursue their passions and fulfil their responsibilities. Across the school, we have been working extensively to support our students and assist them as reflected in communications with ISU families. One important strategy in conversations with children is knowing how to address and discuss social stigma. Please see below some material to help you in these discussions.

### WHAT IS SOCIAL STIGMA?

Social stigma in the context of health is the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with a disease. Such treatment can negatively affect those with the disease, as well as their caregivers, family, friends and communities. People who don't have the disease but share other characteristics with this group may also suffer from stigma. The current COVID-19 outbreak has provoked social stigma and discriminatory behaviours against people of certain ethnic backgrounds as well as anyone perceived to have been in contact with the virus.

### WHY IS COVID-19 CAUSING SO MUCH STIGMA?

The level of stigma associated with COVID-19 is based on three main factors:

- 1) it is a disease that's new and for which there are still many unknowns;
- 2) we are often afraid of the unknown, and
- 3) it is easy to associate that fear with 'others'.

It is understandable that there is confusion, anxiety, and fear among the public. Unfortunately, these factors are also fueling harmful stereotypes.

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

Stigma can undermine social cohesion and prompt possible social isolation of groups, which might contribute to a situation where the virus is more, not less, likely to spread. This can result in more severe health problems and difficulties controlling a disease outbreak. Stigma can:

- Drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination
- Prevent people from seeking health care immediately
- Discourage them from adopting healthy behaviours

## HOW CAN PEOPLE HELP STOP STIGMA RELATED TO COVID-19?

People can fight stigma and help, not hurt, others by providing social support. Counter stigma by learning and sharing facts. Communicating the facts that viruses do not target specific racial or ethnic groups and how COVID-19 actually spreads can help stop stigma.

References: COVID19 Stigma Guide, 24.02.2020., IFRC, Unicef & World Health Organization <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5794622/>  
[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fstigma-faq.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fstigma-faq.html)