

# Stigma during COVID-19

## Those in Isolation

Isolation is an effective way to curb the spread of COVID-19, especially if the affected person is living with individuals who are high risk such as: Elders, seniors or people with chronic illnesses. Going into isolation outside of the residence protects the other people living in the home. Many Nations have established isolations centres in their communities or are providing it outside of the community. It is understandable that some individuals may not want to isolate as it can create divisions in communities or lead to feelings of disempowerment when individuals feel they can't control their circumstances. Showing support, kindness and empathy for individuals who may have contracted COVID-19 and who should isolate can assist in them making the decision to isolate easier and can reduce the stigma that comes with having contracted COVID-19.

### **We must draw from our strengths, cultural ways of knowing, values and practices to help reduce stigma against those who fall ill with COVID-19.**

*Individuals may be recommended to isolate outside of the home for several reasons. Primarily, it is to protect their contacts from acquiring disease. Our experience has told us that overcrowding makes isolation in certain households very difficult. We know that older individuals and those with certain Medical conditions have a higher rate of complications and death from COVID-19.*

*Isolation may also, at times, be recommended for contacts of cases. The hope is that the contacts can be isolated prior to acquiring COVID-19. But they are at risk and need to be monitored.*

*Both cases and contacts that choose to isolate outside their homes should not be stigmatized for it. In fact they should be offered mental health, traditional, and other supports to help them address the difficult emotions experienced by those required to isolate. We can all support them by not spreading misinformation or "blaming the victim" on social media or elsewhere. This can be very harmful to the case or contact and their families. Individuals who choose to isolate should be recognized and thanked for their sacrifice which will keep their families and communities safe. Their efforts need to be respected and celebrated and not diminished.*

### **STIGMA INCREASES BECAUSE OF FEAR**

#### **We don't understand the pandemic.**

This can lead to discrimination against:

- people who have the virus and their families
- people from countries where the virus originated
- people who have travelled recently
- people who have had contact with someone who has the virus
- homeless people or those with substance use issues because they are on the street or moving from place to place

### **WORDS, BEHAVIOURS AND MISCONCEPTIONS THAT CREATE STIGMA AROUND COVID-19**

- Asian or Chinese flu
- blaming people for being careless if they have the virus
- the virus only attacks old people
- pets can give you the virus (some may abandon pets)
- mouthwash, antibiotics, cigarettes, and liquor with high alcohol can kill COVID-19
- food items are contaminated

### **Tips for reducing stigma**

- Use caution with social media and seek credible sources of COVID-19 information (World Health Organization, Thunderbird, Assembly of First Nations) to raise awareness, not fear.
- Support people and respect their privacy
- Try to focus on the positive
- Demonstrate caring behaviour

### **THE IMPACT OF STIGMA**

#### **Stigma can:**

- make people feel guilty or bad about themselves
- cause people to become more isolated to avoid discrimination
- stop people from getting tested or seeking treatment because of fear of facing discrimination
- stop people who are sick or may be in contact with someone who is infected, from going into quarantine to avoid comments in the community
- increase anxiety, doubts, fear, depression, hopelessness

**References:** Canadian Association of Mental Health. (2020). [Mental health and COVID-19](#).

Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. (2011). [Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations People in Canada](#).

Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. (2015). [First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum](#).

