

Module-8: Child protection during pandemics

Session 1: COVID-19

Duration: 7:33 Minutes

As we saw in the video Infectious diseases like COVID-19 can disrupt the environments in which children grow and develop. Disruptions to families, friendships, daily routines and the wider community can have negative consequences for children’s well-being, development and protection.

In addition, measures used to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 can expose children to protection risks.

Home-based, institution-based based quarantine and isolation measures can all negatively impact children and their families.

Additionally, during national lockdowns all economic activities were suspended impacting all and in particular vulnerable and economically weaker sections of society intensifying their economic hardships.

This puts stress on the entire family and children become vulnerable to neglect, abuse and violence.

Therefore, child protection functionaries must be equipped to better respond to the child protection risks during a COVID-19 pandemic.

In the subsequent sessions we will discuss how child protection functionaries can respond to child protection risks during COVID-19.

What are Pandemics?

A pandemic is defined as “an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people.”¹

We know that the world has witnessed a series of pandemics over centuries, affecting various countries including India.

Various types of Plagues, Flus, Cholera, HIV/AIDS, SARS, etc. are some of the examples of such pandemics. COVID-19 is the latest pandemic in this list.

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) – ‘CO’ stands for corona, ‘VI’ for virus, and ‘D’ for disease – is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, China.

¹ <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/7/11-088815/en/#:~:text=A%20pandemic%20is%20defined%20as,are%20not%20considered%20pandemics>

World Health Organisation (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020.

However, characterizing COVID-19 as a pandemic is not an indication that the virus has become deadlier. Rather, it's an acknowledgement of the disease's geographical spread.

What are the Symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually.

Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell.

About 80% of people recover from the disease without needing special treatment. However, in about 15% of some people, COVID-19 takes a severe form with symptoms such as shortness of breath; loss of appetite; confusion; persistent pain or pressure in the chest and high temperature.

What are the Control and Preventive measures?

We have been practicing the preventive measures since the COVID-19 has affected our country. However, it will be good to discuss about various measures we have been following.

- Physical distancing of at least one meter to be followed at all times
- Use of face covers/masks to be mandatory
- Practice frequent hand washing (for at least 40-60 seconds) even when hands are not visibly dirty and use of alcohol based hand sanitizers (for at least 20 seconds)
- Strict practice of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue/handkerchief /flexed elbow and disposing of used tissues properly
- Self-monitoring of health by all and reporting any illness at the earliest²

Let's now watch a video on prevention of COVID-19.

We already know that India is one of the most affected countries with millions of cases. Let's look at what is the status of COVID-19 in India.

As on December 31, India had about 1,02,86,310 confirmed cases, out of which 98,81,732 had recovered and 2,52,699 were active. There have been 1,49,018 deaths.³ As on December 31, 2020, 17,31,11,994 cumulative tests have been done.⁴

²

<https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/GuidelinesonpreventivemeasuresstocontainspreadofCOVID19inworkplacesettings.pdf>

³ <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>

⁴ <https://www.icmr.gov.in/>

Let's now learn the Socio-ecological impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 led to national lockdowns, restriction on mobility and massive migration from cities to rural areas. These factors led to:

- Erosion of social capital; disruption or limited access to basic services
- Break down of trust; competition over scarce resources; limited access to community support services; education and play spaces
- Family separation, reduced access to social supports, caregiver distress, heightened risk of violence/domestic abuse
- Heightened risks to child abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, psychological distress and negative impact on development
- Stigma against certain ethnic groups
- Disruption to livelihood; disrupted family connections and support; fear of the disease⁵.

⁵ Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic (v.1), The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Page 2