



# COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Safeguarding the health of detainees, staff and communities



ICRC

These three sensitization and training videos have been produced by the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** for use by detaining authorities worldwide and for all in the wider public who may be affected by detention, such as families of detainees.

COVID-19 poses challenges in places of detention, given the specific vulnerabilities of detainees and difficulty of containing outbreaks in such settings. The ICRC's approach to COVID-19 in detention is anchored in **support to the authorities who are primarily and ultimately responsible for the protection of both detainees and staff.**

Using an existing virtual prison environment, we have portrayed a fictional detaining authority's response to COVID-19. The videos address the implications of COVID-19 for **detention staff; detainees themselves; and visitors to places of detention** (families, legal counsel, civil society organizations and National Preventive Mechanisms) respectively.

## OBJECTIVES

- \* **Provide a basic training tool for detaining authorities and detention staff** on measures to prevent the spread of illness while preserving the dignity and rights of detainees.
- \* **Sensitize a wider public, such as families of detainees,** to the implications of COVID-19 in places of detention and the type of measures likely to be taken by detaining authorities.



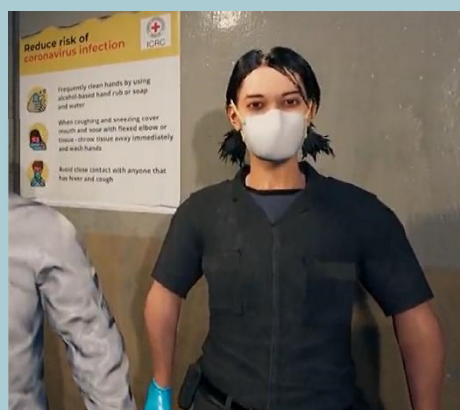
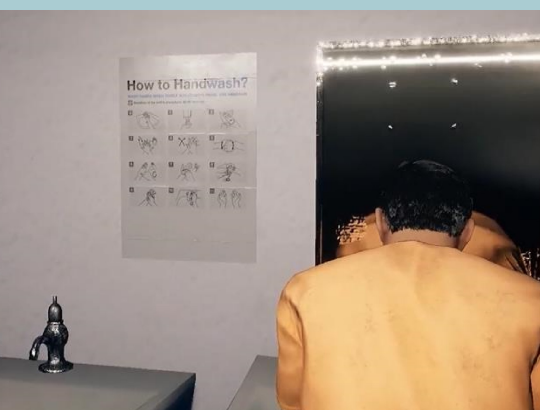
We encourage authorities to disseminate and discuss these videos among their staff when dealing with COVID-19 preparedness and response. The accessible and visual nature of these tools makes them particularly useful as **talking points** to spark discussion among detention staff on measures to be taken in their context.

## KEY MESSAGES

The key message of these videos is the importance of ensuring **good communication** with detainees, detention staff and visitors on COVID-19. Regular updates on measures taken should be given to build trust, defuse tensions and facilitate their acceptance by all. It is important to state that these measures protect the health of both detainees and staff, as well as surrounding communities.

Moreover:

- \* **Contingency plans** should be drafted, and standard operating procedures reviewed in each place of detention, in accordance to the epidemiological situation.
- \* **Basic protective measures** such as handwashing, respiratory hygiene and social distancing should be promoted among detainees, staff and visitors when possible.
- \* **Screening of staff, new arrivals and visitors** upon entry should be considered depending on the seriousness of the situation in the community.
- \* **Any restrictive measures** imposed on detainees such as isolation or the reduction of activities should be necessary, proportionate and consider the human rights of detainees.
- \* **When a decision to restrict or suspend visits is made**, alternative means of contact (phone calls, letters, videos) should be looked into.
- \* **Treatment of infected detainees** should respect the principle of equivalence of care.



## USEFUL LINKS:

[WHO general guidance](#)

[WHO Interim Guidance on COVID-19 in places of detention](#)

[ICPA Resource Centre on COVID-19](#)

[Europris Resources on COVID-19](#)

[CPT Statement of Principles on COVID-19](#)

[PRI Briefing on COVID-19](#)

International Committee of the Red Cross  
19, avenue de la Paix  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
T +41 22 734 60 01  
F +41 22 733 20 57  
[www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org)



# COVID-19 IN DETENTION

## Communicating with detainees in times of crisis



ICRC

Places of detention are inevitably becoming more volatile because of fears surrounding COVID-19 and its implications for detainees and their relatives. In these challenging times, **good communication with detainees** (and to some extent their relatives, representatives and leaders) is vital.

In contexts where trust is low and dialogue is poor, the risk of tensions is significant. However, good communication can convey the importance of measures being taken, and ultimately protect the health of all.

### What to communicate:

Detainees should be informed of:

- The measures** to be adopted;
- Why** they are necessary;
- How** they are to be carried out;
- How long** they are being introduced for;
- How often** they will be reviewed.

Important issues include:

- Treatment of ill detainees**, particularly the most vulnerable
- Isolation of suspected cases**, emphasizing that these are healthcare and not disciplinary measures
- Any changes in established routines** such as meal delivery, movement or access to fresh air
- Any changes in the provision of activities** such as work, education or recreational activities
- Family visits** and alternative ways to contact relatives
- Conditions for early release** if such a plan to relieve overcrowding exists

### How to communicate:

- **Communication should be honest, empathetic and inclusive:** detainees should all be kept wholly informed of all measures taken, in a way that acknowledges their impact on their needs and mental health.
- **Communication should be regular and up to date:** authorities should organise periodic briefings on a regular, consistent basis and inform detainees of any changes or new developments.
- **Direct communication from a senior manager may have more impact:** this helps give detainees the sense that their issues are taken seriously.
- **Staff and senior managers should model good behaviour:** the appearance of double standards may lead to low compliance with the measures implemented.
- **Information should be given in person when possible:** oral briefings are ideal, provided they respect physical distancing measures and give opportunities for detainees to ask questions and receive answers. If gatherings are not an option, door to door briefings should be considered.
- **Remember that not everyone can read:** keep posters or any other written communication succinct and visual; or use alternatives such as radio/video messages or oral briefings.
- **Informal networks can help spread messages:** if some influent detainees are more likely to be believed than staff, it may be possible to brief them and support them in passing on information.
- **Community engagement is vital:** it is crucial that families and other external stakeholders (such as religious and community leaders) are kept informed of measures taken within the place of detention. Their buy-in can help secure the trust of detainees.
- **Get feedback on communication:** rumours and gossip may spread quickly. Good dialogue also means paying attention to the way information is received and whether it fulfils the aim intended.